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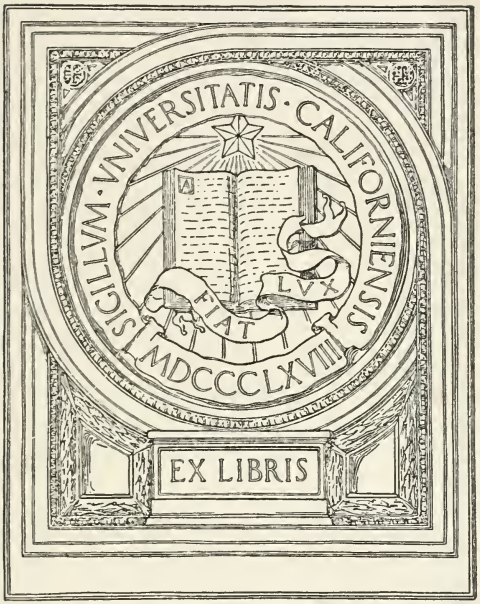
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VIOLA;

OR,

ADVENTURES IN THE FAR SOUTH-WEST

BY EMERSON BENNETT,

AUTHOR OF "CLARA MORELAND," "THE FORGED WILL," "THE PIONEER'S DAUGHTER," "WALDE-WARREN," ETC., ETC.

"We consider this altogether the best fiction which Mr. Bennett has yet written. In saying this, we pay him the highest possible compliment, as he has long been one of the most popular of American novelists. His publisher has done every thing that was possible to add to the public desire for the work, having issued it in a very handsome style, so that its dress might not disgrace its merits. Viola is destined to have an immense sale" —*Ladies' National Magazine.*

"It is written with a great deal of spirit; it abounds in stirring incidents and adventures, has a good love-plot interwoven with it, and is a faithful representation of Life in the Far South-West. Mr. Bennett is destined to great popularity, especially at the South and West. His publisher has issued this book in a very handsome style."—*Philadelphia Evening Bulletin.*

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TO

JAMES W. NEWLIN, ESQ.,

OF PHILADELPHIA,

THIS STORY,

As a slight token of Friendship and Esteem,

IS SINCERELY INSCRIBED,

BY THE AUTHOR.

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VIOLA;

OR,

ADVENTURES IN THE FAR SOUTH-WEST.

CHAPTER I.

MYSELF.

"AWAY! away! away! three cheers for freedom! and ho for the sunny South!"

Such was my mental exclamation, as I stood on the hurricane deck of one of the finest and fastest of those grand "floating palaces" of the West, and beheld the beautiful city of Louisville, Kentucky, receding from my view. I could have shouted aloud for joy—I felt such ardent exultation. I was just in the prime of life, full of romance, in good health, in glorious spirits, and bound for adventure. I was free, free as the winds of heaven, to roam wheresoever my fancy inclined. More than a month had elapsed since I had bidden adieu to my friends in the Old Dominion, and the first keen pang of separation was now over. Not that I had forgotten those I had left behind me—oh, no—memory of them could only cease with death; but the pain of parting was beginning to be dulled by absence, and I felt like enjoying the present with my

whole soul, and trusting to God for the future. That future! that unrecorded point of time! shut in by a veil through which no mortal eye can penetrate!—could I then have seen it—could I then have known—But let me not anticipate.

From my youth up, I had longed for novelty—to travel—to go abroad and see the world for myself—and now the great desire of my life was being gratified. And so it would have been years before, could I have had my own way; but I was under age, and my father inexorable.

"Wait, sir!" he would say, whenever I advanced the proposition: "you are a boy yet—a foolish boy—and don't know your own mind. Wait, sir, till you have attained your majority; and then you will be your own master, and can do as you please."

"And depend upon it, father," I would reply, not altogether in the most amiable mood—"depend upon it, I shall make good use of my freedom!"

And here, reader, as I trust we are to make a pleasant pilgrimage together, it may be as well that you know something of one who is to be your companion. I know nothing of you, it is true; but I see no good reason why you should be alike ignorant of myself—more especially as I am extremely anxious to get into your good graces at the start. I will not detain you long, for I abhor a family yarn, spun out to the length and with the minuteness of the log of a three years' cruiser; and besides, we shall have amusement and adventure enough on our journey, to fully occupy our time. Without more circumlocution, consider yourself seized by the button.

In the first place, let me tell you, that we in the "Old Dominion," have a certain affinity to the moon—insomuch as, in no small degree, we shine by reflected light—or, in other words, our standard of respectability is established

by our ancestors; and as the great majority of us are all of the "first families," the precedence of superiority is only accorded to the longest lineage. In this regard, if in no other, I am about as respectable an acquaintance, of home production, as you will be likely to find. I genealogically belong to that honorable class of individuals, known as the Cavaliers, who migrated to this country in the time of Cromwell; and therefore, when at home, I boast of the best blood of Old Virginia—though abroad I find it just as well to say nothing about it.

My father inherited the name of Walton, and, at the death of his father, an estate worth fifty thousand dollars, exclusive of blacks enough to work the plantation—so that in the good things of this world, it may be said he had a very fair share at the start. He married an estimable and accomplished lady, who bore him three children—two daughters, and your humble servant. Alas! to give me life, her own was sacrificed, and therefore I never enjoyed the blessing of beholding my lamented mother. My infancy was taken charge of by a black nurse; and as I grew in years and knowledge, my affections were pretty equally divided between Old Moll, as we termed her, and my nearest kin. If I was in trouble, who so ready to listen to my childish sorrows as Old Moll? and who so ready with kind and soothing words? If I wanted a particular favor of my father, Old Moll was the medium through which I obtained it. If I was guilty of a wrong action, and my father sought to correct me, you should have seen Old Moll interpose her black, burly figure between me and my paternal ancestor, and beg me off with some such words as these:

"N-n-now don't please, Massa Wal'on, dis time, don't! Little Hal not well: 'deed and 'deed he berry sick, massa!—he cotch eber so much cold all last night, de poor chile!—

'sides, massa, he got 'flammatory information of de stomach, de bowels, de congections; and he neber do so agin, no more, I pledge you my word 'n honor, true as gospel!" and seeing the least relentment on the part of my father, she would generally establish a peace, by catching me up into her arms and beating a hasty retreat from the seat of war.

I did not always escape unscathed, it is true; for sometimes the ridiculous pleadings of Molly made me laugh outright; and then I generally got the punishment I deserved. Poor Old Moll! how I loved her! and even now I recall her good-natured ebony visage, with tears in my eyes.

As the reader has, doubtless, anticipated, I was christened Henry; but for a long time I answered to no other appellation than Hal, generally with the adjective, little, prefixed; and to this day, with a stature of nearly six feet, and a weight of thirteen stone, the elder citizens of Swansdown would never think of greeting me save as Little Hal. Among my playmates and schooll-fellows, I was sometimes termed Harry; but they generally adopted the shortest nick-name; and as for Henry, I never heard myself addressed so but once, and then by a very staid, precise, and venerable Methodist preacher. For the matter of being called Henry, I might as well have been christened Bartholomew, Nicodemus, or Nebuchadnezzar.

As for my education, it was tolerably fair, as the world goes. I was never much of a book-worm: but I could fence, box, wrestle, dance, run, jump, ride a horse, shoot a rifle, and play whist or the fiddle, billiards or the banjo, with the best of them. I fear the reader will think none the better of me for these "vanity-fair" accomplishments; but I must speak the truth, and console myself with the reflection, that if he don't like me as I am, it is a very easy matter for him to cut my acquaintance. As to per-

sonal appearance, Old Moll always asseverated, that "young Massa Wal'on was jest de hamsomest buck in all Wargin'a," which was equivalent to saying in all the world, for her geographical knowledge extended not beyond the limits of the Old Dominion. As I never disputed her on this point when at home, I see no good reason for quarrelling with her opinion now that we are separated.

My twenty-first anniversary, I flatter myself, was celebrated in a style worthy of my ancestors and their descendants. The next day I felt unwell, and kept my bed; the second I was convalescent, much to my own delight and Old Moll's, who, out of pure kindness, would have killed me in a week with soups and gruel. My father now called me into the library, and said:

"Well, Hal, you are free; and at my banker's, in Richmond, you will find ten thousand dollars deposited to your order. Is that satisfactory?"

"It will do for the present," I answered.

"Well, what do you intend to set yourself about first?"

"Packing my trunks; paying my score, and taking leave of my friends."

"You are determined to go abroad, then?"

"With your permission."

"I have no control over you now. But for what part of the world are you bound?"

"I have not yet decided."

"Well, my son, may the good God watch over, and heaven's blessings attend you!" and my father walked out of the library at a quicker pace than usual.

In a week every thing was prepared for my journey, and one fine morning I found myself taking leave of my friends. The trial was more severe than I had anticipated—but I was not one to falter in my resolution. I shook hands all round, and spoke the parting words in as strong a voice as

I could command. I felt a choking in my throat, and I tried to choke it down, but that only made it worse. My father hemmed, coughed, tried to sneeze, and finally ended by applying his handkerchief to his nasal organ, and muttering something about having caught a severe cold. My sisters wept—the blacks generally blubbered—but as for poor Old Moll, she yelled outright with hysterical emotion, and declared her old heart was "just broke into twenty hundred pieces," and that "she'd die 'trait off 'fore de broke of 'nudder day."

At last I was off; and the rumble of the vehicle, that bore me swiftly away from the scenes of boyhood—from the scenes that I loved—from home and its associations—seemed to strike on my heart like a death knell. I lay back in the carriage; and now that there were none to witness my emotion, I gave full vent to my pent up feelings, and paid a tribute to the past, and the friends behind me, in a flood of tears.

On quitting my native land, I took with me one living remembrancer of by-gones, in the shape of a stout, healthy, good tempered negro servant. I had selected Tom for several reasons. In the first place, he was about my own age, and had long served me as a *valet de chambre;* we had become mutually attached; and though some may smile to hear the assertion, yet it is no less true, we loved each other as brothers, but without overstepping the nicely drawn line of distinction between master and slave. In the second place, Tom was shrewd, intelligent, though negrofied, and knew exactly how to humor me. In the third place, he was not unlike myself, bold, daring, fearless, and had besides a rich vein of humor running through his ebony composition. In the fourth place, like the lawyer's sixteen reasons, each one of which was conclusive, I could not do without him.

And now, having introduced myself to you, reader, with such little etcetera as I have deemed proper, if you like me well enough to accept me for a travelling companion, rest assured it shall not be my fault if we do not part friends at the end of the journey.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE COMPANION, AND A STARTLING INCIDENT.

As I have said in the opening of this narrative, that more than a month had elapsed since bidding farewell to my friends, I have not thought best to trouble the reader with any detail of my journey thus far, more especially as no incidents occurred on my way hither worthy of note. Consider me therefore still on the hurricane deck of the Neptune, and bound for a southern clime.

It was a clear, delightful morning, in the beginning of September, in the year of our Lord 1845. The sun had risen in golden splendor, and now shone brightly down upon the glassy bosom of La Belle Riviere, whose surface was like a mirror, save where the rushing steamer threw up a silvery spray, and sent a hundred tiny wavelets dancing to the shore. A soft south breeze, sweeping over the green hills of old Kentucky, gently fanned my brow, and gave me invigorating relief from the recent heats of summer. I was, as I have said, in an exulting mood; and as I stood and gazed upon the green shores, and beheld here and there a picturesque hamlet, on either land, I felt as if I could love every body, and every thing; and I poured forth my gratitude in a silent prayer to the great Giver of all good.

At length I turned to descend to the cabin, when I espied my servant approaching me, accompanied by a very genteel young man, dressed in black.

"Dat massa," said Tom, pointing to me; and then, as

if his mission were finished, he made a low bow, and disappeared.

The stranger approached me with a smile, a slight inclination of the head, and holding out his hand, said:

"Mr. Walton, I hope you will allow me the pleasure of renewing our acquaintance;" and then perceiving by my look and manner that he was not recognized, he added; "You have forgotten me, I see; but we have met before, far away from this. My name is Harley—Morton Harley, at your service."

I now remembered that one night at a ball in Swansdown, I had been introduced to a stranger of that name; and I cheerfully made known my recognition, and cordially shook his hand; for the very fact that he had been once in the village of my nativity, made him appear to me like an old and valued friend.

"But how did you learn of my being aboard?" I inquired.

"I saw your name on your baggage below, and made inquiry of your servant; and it is with no affectation that I say, I am rejoiced to meet you here. But tell me, Mr. Walton, whither are you bound?"

"That the future can alone determine," I replied, gaily; "my present destination is New Orleans."

"Then you have fixed on nothing beyond the Crescent city."

"Not positively, though I have a leaning toward Mexico. But I am free to go whithersoever my will inclines; and so I have plenty of adventure, I little care in what part of the world I find it."

"Your hand, Mr. Walton!" said Harley almost enthusiastically. "I trust we shall ever be friends, and long be travelling companions, I too am for adventure—for novelty—for seeing strange places—strange faces—in

short, for anything that will drive from my mind—" He stopped suddenly, a strange, dark, melancholy expression swept over his pale features, and merely saying, "Excuse me! I am not well," he wheeled on his heel, and disappeared down the stairs leading to the cabin-guard.

I was so surprised by his singular manner, that I stood staring after him for several moments, before the idea occurred to me that perhaps he was really ill, and that it was my duty to follow and tender my services. I hurried down to the cabin, and looked eagerly among the passengers, but nowhere beheld the object of my search. Perceiving my servant seated on a trunk, I hurried up to him.

"Tom," I said, "did that gentleman you conducted to me, just now, enter the cabin?"

"Didn't see him, massa."

"Go out on the guards, and see if you can find him! Make haste, and let me know, for the gentleman is ill."

Tom hurried away to execute my orders, but soon returned, and in his peculiar way reported the gentleman was not to be found,

"This is strange!" I mused—"very strange!"

An idea struck me; and hastening to the clerk's office, I requested to know the number of Morton Harley's stateroom. The clerk looked over the register, and replied that there was no such name entered on the book. Still more surprised than ever, I went down stairs, and carefully searched the deck from bow to stern, but found no trace of Morton Harley. I returned to the cabin, and sent Tom to the hurricane deck, thinking it not improbable Harley had gone back to find me. But all search proved vain, my new acquaintance had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, and there was none to give me the least clue to his whereabouts. I felt vexed and uneasy—vexed, that he should leave me so abruptly—uneasy, lest something

serious had befallen him. Perhaps he has fallen overboard and been drowned, I said to myself; and my spirits, but now so buoyant, became greatly depressed in consequence. At dinner I noted every man that took his seat at the table—at supper I did the same—but the face of Harley was not among them. I then questioned the steward and other servants, if there were any one sick about the boat—but all my answers were in the negative.

This completely quenched the last faint spark of hope I had of ever beholding Harley again; and seating myself by one of the now cleared tables, in the forward part of the cabin, I rested my head upon my hand, and gave way to a gloomy reverie.

How long I sat there, lost to everything around me, I do not know; but I was finally aroused to a consciousness of passing events, by some one touching me on the shoulder, and saying, in a bland tone:

"I beg pardon, sir, for disturbing you—but we have just made up a party of whist, and all the tables forward are occupied."

I started, as if suddenly awakened from a dream, and, by a hasty glance around, perceived that the eyes of several gentlemen were fixed upon me. Understanding more from their looks, than the words of the speaker—which I had heard, but only partially comprehended—that they required the table for their game, I arose, made a slight inclination of the head, and passed out of the cabin upon the guards.

The night was clear and serene, and the azure vault of heaven was sparkling with thousands on thousands of those bright, mysterious luminaries of other worlds. I say mysterious, for none living have yet been able to soar to their far off abodes, on the wings of science, and make known their organization and design.—Poets have imagined, phi-

losophers have reasoned, and theologians have asserted, these worlds to be what was most in accordance with their varying idiosyncrasies; but neither the imagination of the first, the reasoning of the second, nor the assertions of the third, have established a single fact in regard to them. There they shine, as they have shone for centuries—for ages—the great, incomprehensible work of Him that was before chaos, that will be forever. Science, which measures the sun, the moon, the earth, and all the planets—which tells us their distance from us and each other—the time of their revolutions—the velocity with which they travel through space—is utterly futile when brought to bear upon them; and man, with all his boasted knowledge, when he seriously contemplates them, becomes bewildered and lost in the boundless region of speculation. What they are, and what their design, we shall never know in time—eternity, perhaps, will reveal the great secret.

I turned my eyes to the starry firmament, and gazed upon it for more than an hour, in that peculiar frame of mind I have attempted to describe. A cool night-breeze fanned my heated temples, and gave relief to my aching brow; and the hoarse steam-notes of the rushing vessel, and the rippling of the waters beneath, fell on my ear with a kind of monotonous melody, that at length made me drowsy. I arose, and after glancing at the placid river, the lights here and there dancing on its dark bosom, the dim and undefined shores, I sought my state room, and a sweet sleep, and a dream of home, proved a happy oblivion to the morbid excitement of the day.

I arose on the following morning, greatly refreshed in body and mind. As I was about sitting down to breakfast, a hand was laid familiarly on my shoulder. I turned, and judge of my astonishment, on beholding Harley standing by my side. For a moment or two I was too much

surprised to speak; and in that short space of time I surveyed his person and features more minutely than ever before. As he is destined to figure conspicuously in my narrative, a brief description of his appearance and characteristics may not here be deemed improper.

In person he was slender, and slightly made—though in reality he possessed a muscular power that belied his looks. His stature was about five feet ten inches, and his age some three or four and twenty, with an almost beardless chin, that made him appear boyish and effeminate. His features were regular and intellectual, but lacked what may be termed *manly* beauty. His face was long and thin, with a prominent nose, that was neither Roman, Grecian, nor aquiline, and yet to a certain degree partook of each. His mouth and chin were beautiful, and his bluish gray eyes had in general a winning, fascinating expression, though there were times when they exhibited a restlessness and wildness really painful to behold. His forehead was high, full, and expansive, from which his light brown hair was carefully brushed back, in the most approved mode. He dressed well and richly, was very precise in his toilet, and altogether had a very *distingue* air.

Such is the *tout ensemble* of one who was destined to exercise no trifling influence on my future career. Whether he may be considered my good or evil genius, I leave the reader to determine by the sequel.

That he was, in a great degree, a marked character, the reader will readily credit from the specimen given. The versatility of his mind exceeded that of almost any being with whom it has ever been my fortune to come in contact. That he was always sane, I very much question—though if ever insane, there was a method in it. He was a natural musician—could sing delightfully, and play on almost any instrument. He was also a poet by nature, and a

scholar by education. He was at times lively to excess, and moody to misanthropy. He was by turns a humorist, a practical joker, a sentimentalist, a satirist, a moralist, an enthusiast, and always a fatalist. The more I saw of him, the more difficult I found it to comprehend him. Nature had made him a genius, but had never established a harmonious equilibrium between his different faculties. How one so eccentric in almost everything else, could be so precise in his toilet, was a matter that puzzled me to understand as much as any other.

In short, he was a peculiarity—an oddity—a none-such—and one every way calculated to suit me for a travelling companion, inasmuch as I should never lack variety, never die of *ennui*.

I will only add, that, as regarded his own history, he was for sometime incommunicative; and when I chanced to touch on the subject, ever enshrouded himself in a veil of mystery, that excited, while it baffled, my curiosity. For the rest, I shall let him speak and act for himself.

"My dear sir," said Harley, gaily, smiling at my surprise, "I am delighted to see you!—how do you find yourself this morning?" and he seized and shook my hand with as much heartiness as if we had just met after a year's separation.

"In the name of the seven wonders," replied I, "where have you been hiding for the last twenty-four hours? for I see and feel it is you, and no ghost, though I was just on the point of ordering Tom to tie crape round my hat."

"But you thought it best to mourn on a full stomach, eh?" pointing to the breakfast, which was now ready. "Come, sit down—the first table is better than the second, to say nothing of the looks of the thing. There, now, we can do two things at once—talk and eat. Waiter, a piece of that steak, rare. So, Harry—excuse me! but I must

call you Harry, or I shall fancy I am talking to a stranger —so you made a regular search for me, eh! and then sat down and said, '*Non est inventus?*' Why, man alive, I was in my state-room, rolled up snug in the blankets, and snoring away with a forty horse power. Coffee, boy—strong—none of your dish-water now. Harry, I'll trouble you for that omelet; and while your hand is in, you may pass those mashed potatoes, and the bread—these woolly-headed servants are so confounded lazy. Ah! excuse me! I forgot that Tom was behind your chair; but of course he is an exception. By Jove! it is glorious to eat—particularly after a fast of twenty-four hours. Eh! did you speak?"

"Yes! I was going to say, I made inquiry of the clerk for your state-room, and he said there was no Morton Harley on the register."

"Very likely—but you will find a Smith Jones there, or a Jones Smith, I forget which."

"Do you then travel incognito?"

"I travel any way, but do not feel bound to write my name in every old musty book, for a set of jackasses to stare at. Besides, if this floating machine should blow up, and I get killed, perhaps my name would be paraded in the newspapers, to the grief of my friends and the joy of my enemies; and some old woman would say, 'Poor fellow! so he's dead at last.' Blown up in a steamboat! think of that, Harry! What glory is there in such a death as that? Bah! I would sooner not die at all."

"But why did you leave me so abruptly yesterday?"

"I was ill—one of my spells. When you see me in that way, just let me alone; nature is my best physician—for the simple reason, that I am not ready to die yet—when I am, I shall send for the faculty, and employ at least three, to hasten the crisis. 'After all, your doctors are a useful

class; for without them the world would get peopled too fast —they are the safety-valves to a surplus population. Tom, hand round my cup to that black imp yonder for some more coffee, and give him a slight hint not to be all day about it. Harry, I'll trouble you for that omelet once more. Thank you! By-the-bye, do you ever write?"

"I have scribbled a little, though nothing to my credit," I replied. "However, I have some thoughts of keeping a journal of my adventures—that is, if I have any worth recording."

"Good! a capital idea! excellent! and I'll take care you have something to write about. But, *entre nous*, you must make a character of me! I must figure there, if only to play second fiddle. You shall be Don Quixote, and I'll be Sancho Panza, your chosen squire. On state occasions I'll be your prime minister. Capital thing this writing, and having the whole public to laugh at your jokes, smile at your follies, and weep at your misfortunes. I had some thoughts of turning author myself once; but then it's such a bore to write; and besides, if you please yourself, ten to one you don't any body else. Then if you publish, there is a set of carping critics to come pouncing down upon you, like a hawk upon a chicken; and the more merit you have, the greater fool they'll make you appear. They'll turn your most honied words into gall, and all your eloquent passages into rhodomontade. Your original ideas they'll swear point blank are plagiarisms, and bring in the ghost of some Greek, Vandal, or Goth, to prove it. If you make one grammatical slip, they'll prove your ignorance in something less than a column; and after destroying all your good things, or ascribing them to some unheard of author, they'll collect all your faults into a heap, like a cart-load of old rubbish, and pile them upon your devoted head. Ossa upon Pelion. If your sentences are all correct, smooth,

and beautiful, with well-rounded periods, they'll cry you tame, monotonous, prosy; if you dash out in a bold, vigorous manner, they'll make fun of your style, and give you credit for being a lunatic. In short, say what you will, do what you will, you are sure to be done for by these literary Harpies, who will plunder you, mentally, as their namesakes did of old the table of Phineus. Bah! I hate critics; for they dine on worm-wood, take nut-gall for dessert, and use vinegar as a beverage."

Thus my new acquaintance rattled on, from one thing to another, apparently at home on every topic; and so mingled humor, satire, and sentiment, that I never wearied of listening to his conversation. Breakfast over, we repaired to the hurricane deck, to enjoy in freedom the morning air. Some twenty of the passengers were already before us, and were standing, sitting, or sauntering about, as best suited their several inclinations. Harley selected the most marked among them, and soon gave proof, by his remarks, that he was a great adept in human nature. He would look at a man a few moments, and then tell you all his prominent characteristics, and even penetrate his very thoughts, as he more than once convinced me by addressing the individual on the subject uppermost in his mind. I might cite several instances, but I must pass on to more important matters.

Whoever has travelled much on the Western waters, needs not to be told that gambling on the boats is a very prominent feature; and that, as a consequence, scenes sometimes occur of a nature to make one's blood run chill with horror. I will record one that came under my own observation, and which, as the sequel will prove, had a slight bearing on my subsequent history.

Among the passengers who, by some peculiarity of look or manner, more particularly attracted our attention, (I say

ours, for Harley and I soon became almost inseparable,) was a young man, of a wan, sallow, cadaverous countenance, who seemed to be laboring under a disease which preyed more or less upon his vitals. I had often remarked him standing near some one of the card-tables, and watching the game with an intensity of look, I may term it eagerness of expression, which for one who had no interest in the stakes, one who was merely a spectator like myself, seemed very remarkable. I asked my friend what he thought of it.

"Sir," he replied, "that young man has a natural pas sion for gaming; he has tried it more than once and lost; and he has secretly sworn never to touch another card. Yes, sir, it is as difficult for him to resist the temptation here offered, as it is for the habitual drunkard to push back the poisonous stimulant held to his lips by the hand of one he esteems his friend. God aid him in his virtuous struggle! for if he touches a card now, he is forever ruined."

As he spoke, Harley approached the stranger, and shaking his head, said, gravely, in one of his blandest tones:

"No, no, my friend, it will not do."

The invalid started, and turned upon Harley a look in which surprise and gratitude were strangely blended.

"You are right," he replied, "and I thank your for the caution;" and turning upon his heel, he retired to a distant part of the saloon.

An hour later I again saw him by one of the tables—his ruling passion was stronger than his will and reason. From this moment I watched him more closely than ever; and I noted, with a feeling of commiseration, the painful struggle going on in his mind. I had a presentiment that his evil genius would ultimately triumph—and it did. It was with pain I saw him marked out as a victim by more than one professional gambler in the garb of a gentleman.

For a day or two, however, all the overtures of these gentry were met by a decided refusal; and I had just begun to indulge the hope that he would escape the fatal snare, when, alas! to my great regret, I saw him yield. He sat down to the table, played almost recklessly for a couple of hours, and arose winner to no inconsiderable amount. His pale features were now flushed with triumph, and his dark eyes had a wild, unsettled look, that showed how powerfully his feelings were excited by the result. He clutched his winnings with the eagerness of a miser, and, as if afraid to trust himself longer in such company, darted away to his state-room.

"Alas!" said Harley, "he is lost; his success to-night will be his ruin to-morrow; it is the bait of the fowler."

The next night I saw the invalid take his place among the gamblers at an early hour. As if expecting some terrible catastrophe, those who had been in the habit of playing at the different tables, now gathered around the fated young man, and stood anxious spectators of the scene in which he was taking a part. Not a word was spoken, and the silence was ominous and oppressive. I stood where I could watch the countenance of the invalid, as well as that of his adversary. The former was unusually pale and haggard, with a nervous twitching of the muscles about the mouth, and a glaring wildness of the eyes, that was painful to behold. Occasionally a deep flush would pass over his thin, wasted features, and then, retreating suddenly, leave them of a ghastly hue, with the exception perhaps of a bright red spot on either cheek. It was an awful sight to behold this battling of disease and the passions with the broken constitution of one already doomed! and I watched the game with a painful interest I had never before experienced. In contradistinction to his victim the professional gambler was cool, calm, collected,

and seemingly indifferent to all that was taking place. He knew his power and was using it with fatal precision. Oh! how I abhorred him from my very soul!

The game commenced, and continued for an hour, with success alternating between the two players. Then the gambler began to win, and then the struggle of life and death began with his victim, who, at the loss of every stake, seemed to grow more and more desperate, till at last his eyes glared and rolled horribly, and he exhibited all the frenzy of a maniac. Another hour, and he was ruined—his last cent was gone.

For a moment or two he glared at the pile of money, which the gambler was already beginning to transfer to his pocket; and then uttering a thrilling cry, something between a shriek and a groan, he sprang to his feet and dashed his hands violently against his temples, exclaiming,

"Oh! my God! my God! what have I done? Ruined my poor old mother! gambled away her only dependence! Oh! sir! sir! (to the gambler) give me back that money! it was not mine, it was not mine, sir! I had no right to use it—it was my mother's. Oh! sir! give it back to me, and on my knees I will bless you, and pledge my soul's salvation that I will never touch a card again! If you will not give me all, give me a part, for I am *ruined;*" and as if the word "ruined" conjured up madness, he made a spring at the money, when the unfeeling wretch, who had won his all, repulsed him with a blow, that staggered him back against the wall.

I was too much excited to consider consequences, but acting on the impulse of the moment, I raised my hand and felled the gambler to the ground. I was about following up my advantage, to give him a severer chastisement, when a cry of horror from the crowd arrested my attention. I sprang forward to ascertain the cause, and saw the invalid

reclining against the wall, the most horrible spectacle I had ever beheld. The excitement and the blow had caused him to burst a blood-vessel, and the warm current of life was now gushing from his mouth and nose, and he was actually weltering in his own gore. A single moment he sat thus; and then gurgling forth, "My moth-er!" fell over on his side a corpse.

I bent down to ascertain if he were dead, and the action probably saved my life; for at that moment the report of a pistol startled the crowd; and a ball, passing just over my head, lodged in the side of the saloon. It was the work of the gambler, who thus sought to take his revenge on me for my interference. There was a general cry of,

"Lynch him! Lynch him!" But he had already escaped—for the boat at the time was lying against the shore to wood.

I made inquiry of the clerk, and with the little he knew, and the examination of some letters found in his trunk, I learned the name of the young man, and that his mother resided at a small village in Texas. I made a note of all, and resolved, if I chanced in that vicinity, to visit her, break the sad news of her son's death, and, should she need, give her pecuniary aid.

The next day the victim was buried at a small island, where we again stopped to wood. We followed him to his humble grave; and over his mortal remains I took a solemn oath, that I would never gamble again. I had been taught a lesson, that, to the latest day of my existence, I could never forget.

CHAPTER III.

LUDICROUS AND MYSTERIOUS.

ARRIVED at New Orleans, I decided on taking rooms at the St. Charles, and making a short sojourn, in order to see the city. My friend acquiesced in my decision, but said that for himself there could be nothing new here, as he had visited the city divers times before.

"But I can the better act as guide to you, therefore," he concluded; "so my dear Harry, leave all to me. I will select the rooms, register the names, order everything, and, if you like, be your private secretary."

"I do not understand you in the latter particular," I answered.

"No? Well, no matter; do you follow my counsel, when I give any, and all will be well."

I had no reason to complain of the rooms my friend selected, for they were among the best in that famous hotel; but one little incident that occurred shortly after my establishing myself in them, I may as well relate, *en passant.*

It was after nightfall when the Neptune arrived at the landing; and it might have been a couple of hours later, that I found myself seated in a splendidly furnished parlor, which had been assigned me, scanning the news of the day from the columns of one of the local journals. I was alone, for Harley had made some excuse to go out by himself. Presently a waiter entered, and bowing very obsequiously, said:

"Will your lordship come down to supper, or have it served here?"

"I will come down."

The waiter bowed and withdrew, and immediately after the gong sent its crashing notes through all the house.

At supper I could not but observe that very particular attention was paid to me; but I only thought to myself, the proprietors of the St. Charles know how to make a stranger feel at his ease and at home. On returning from the table to my private parlor, Tom met me, and said, with a grin:

"Massa Hal, I tink you got to be great man all a sudden."

"What do you mean, Tom?"

"In dar, you see;" and Tom pointed to my private rooms, and grinned again.

I went in, and was somewhat surprised to find several gentlemen apparently awaiting my return, for they all rose on my entrance, and bowed obsequiously. Then the foremost, or the one nearest me, advanced, and said, placing his hand on his heart, and inclining his body to a bend he intended should appear the height of politeness:

"My nam' is Jean Perouse. I sall have le grand honeur to measure your lordship for one suit a la mode."

"Sir, I do not understand you! this is some mistake," I replied.

"No meestake your lordship, I do assure. I sall have done in one little mineet;" and the man out with his measuring tape, and began to apply it to my person, adding: "It is all be right, your lordship—it is all be right."

He was very expeditious, and said, as he finished, and bowed himself out:

"To-morrow night, I sall have le grand honeur for to send your lordship suit, a la mode. Adieu."

"Well, that is cool," thought I, as I stared after the tailor.

"My name is Bantam, at your lordship's service," said a voice at my elbow.

I turned, and beheld another of my visitors, a well-dressed man, just in the act of making a low bow.

"My dear sir—" I began.

"It is all right, your lordship," he interrupted. "I am a hatter, your lordship, and have called to take the measure of your lordship's head;" and forthwith he proceeded to cast a band around my cranium.

"But, sir—"

"Twenty-three inches," he interrupted again; "all right, your lordship. I will send round the hat to-morrow. Meantime, I am your lordship's very humble servant;" and with another low bow, *he* went out.

"Confound the fellows! what do they mean?" was my mental exclamation; but I had not time to say anything, when up came the third, and, with the same obsequious air, proceeded:

"My name is Smith, your lordship I am, by profession, a gentleman bootmaker. If your lordship will only be seated for a moment, I shall have the honor to take the measure of your lordship's foot."

"My dear sir," I replied, beginning to get perfectly bewildered, "you shall have the honor of measuring *both feet*, if you will only explain what all this means."

"It is all right, I do assure your lordship. Will your lordship please to be seated, till I draw your lordship's boot?"

"But, sir! Mr. Jones—"

"*Smith*, sir—Smith is my name, your lordship. Pray

don't confound me with the Jones's !—the Jones's in my line are only snobs."

"Well, Smith or Jones, snob or no snob, it is all one to me," I rejoined, half-angrily, though a good deal amused in spite of myself. "But, sir,—Mr. Smith—there is some error here."

"Oh! no, your lordship; it is all right, I do assure you."

"But I do assure you it is *not* all right," I replied, "and I think I ought to know best. In the first place, I am no lord."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Smith; "very good! clever! very clever! ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you a fool? or a madman?" cried I, growing indignant.

"Neither, your lordship," answered Smith, gravely, "but only a gentleman boot-maker, at your lordship's service. Will your lordship do me the honor to sit?"

"My lordship will do you the honor to kick you down stairs, directly, if you persist in this foolery!" cried I.

"Nay, your lordship, on that, in this country, I could found an action," answered Smith, quietly.

"Faith, man," said I, "I think you would *find* it an action already *founded.* But tell me, now, seriously—who do you take me for?"

"A gentleman, your lordship," replied Smith.

"But why do you wish to measure my foot?"

"To make your lordship a pair of boots."

"But I do not want any boots."

"All right, your lordship, if your lordship will please to sit; I will scarcely detain your lordship a minute."

"Well, these fellows are either mad or I am," was my reflection, as I threw myself on a sofa, and held out my

foot to Mr. Smith, who drew the boot and took the measure with great expedition.

There were two others still in the room, who had thus far kept quietly back and said nothing; but the moment the gentleman boot-maker took his leave, one of these, a small man, advanced rather timidly to where I was sitting.

"Well, sir?" cried I, so savagely, that he started, and took a step or two backward; but seeming to gather new resolution, he again ventured forward, and said, softly, bobbing his head like a tip-up:

"May it please your lordship, my name is Doty, at your lordship's very humble service; and understanding that your lordship would like a carriage—"

The men are either mad, or they mean to insult me, I thought; and I sprung to my feet just as the word 'carriage' was trembling on Mr. Doty's lips; who, divining no doubt from my looks that I intended to make an example of him, left his speech unfinished, and broke for the hall, which was the last I ever saw of him. There was still one remaining, and as I turned upon him, I saw he looked very pale and uneasy, and began to edge toward the door. I stood and watched him, till he got the door between me and him, when, seeming to feel more at his ease, he ventured:

"Your lordship—"

But he ventured no further; for seizing a chair, I made at him, when, turning, he fled, with a yell of terror I shall never forget. The last I saw of him, he was going down stairs, three at a time, to the imminent danger of his legs and neck, which fortunately all got off safe, at least I never heard to the contrary. I now espied Tom, leaning against the balustrade, and holding his sides; and putting down the chair, I walked up to him, and taking him by the arm, led him quietly into my parlor. Then closing the door, I

grasped both arms, and shaking him till my own arms ached, I exclaimed:

"So, boy, this is some of your doings, eh? I'll teach you to play pranks on your master, you rascal!"

"No, no, no," cried Tom, who by this time had found his tongue; "I neber did um, Massa Hal—trute—'fore de angels it is, massa."

"Who did do it then, you black imp?"

"Don' know, Massa Wal'on—'less—'less Massa Harley do um."

The truth now flashed upon me; and throwing off Tom, with a force that sent him spinning round the room, I exclaimed:

"Yes, Harley is at the bottom of it—dunce that I am not to have thought of him before."

As I said this, I heard a suppressed yell in my bedroom, which adjoined the parlor; and hastily throwing open the door, I there beheld Morton Harley, rolling over and over on the bed, with both hands upon his sides, apparently in the last agonies of convulsions. The moment he saw me, he gave vent to such screams of laughter, that I really began to fear he would burst a blood-vessel and alarm the house, though neither event happened.

"My dear sir, you deserve a horse-whipping," said I, as soon as I could make myself heard.

"Don't! your lordship — don't!" groaned Harley, catching his breath for another fit. "Oh! my poor sides! Oh! my poor sides!" and off he went again, till he began to grow black in the face.

Meanwhile, my anger subsiding, I began to view the whole affair as a capital joke, though rather too much at my expense for me to appreciate it as I would had another been the victim. However, by the time that Harley had recovered so as to sit up and talk soberly, I had forgiven

him in so much as my angry feelings were concerned, though I had determined to pay him off in his own coin sooner or later. I rang the bell, and ordered champaigne; and as we filled our glasses—

"Here's to the genius of Morton Harley!" said I.

"Thank you! here's to your lordship!" he returned.

"To his lordship, then, for the first and last time," I rejoined, and emptied my glass.

"Not so fast," said Harley, draining his cup; "you must not dismiss your nobility so soon, and resolve yourself into plain mister. You have begun your part well, considering—pray carry it out—nothing like making a sensation. True, I think you can improve upon it—for in your debut, you rather over-acted, and were too choleric—but then you know, my dear fellow, one cannot arrive at perfection immediately."

"No, no, Harley—a joke is a joke, and so let it end. But tell me how you succeeded in making the other characters play their parts so well; for no matter what I said or did, they seemed not in the least astonished, but to take it all as a matter of course, declaring it was all right. Were they really tradesmen?"

"To be sure they were, and they really believe you to be an English nobleman, very eccentric, and slightly touched here;" and Harley tapped his forehead. "I got them all together, and told them exactly how to proceed, and not to seem surprised at anything you might say or do; and that even if you denied your rank, or asked what it all meant, or in any way became refractory, to persist in their purpose, and only answer you by saying it was all right."

"But the waiter," said I, "when he came to know if I would have my supper here, or would go below, he addressed me in the same style."

"Very likely, for you are registered as Lord Harcourt, England."

"By Jove! this must not be!" cried I: "I will not pass for other than I am."

"Very well, my dear Harry, I will right it, since you do not like it: and perhaps it will be as well, now that I have had my joke and champaigne."

"Do it now, then—this instant."

Harley went out, and was gone some quarter of an hour.

"Well?" said I, on his return.

"I have done it, and saved your credit. I told the clerk you wished to remain incog., and were very much offended because I thoughtlessly made known your rank; so he crossed out Lord Harcourt, and wrote under it plain Henry Walton. I hope now you are satisfied."

"But this tailor, hatter, and gentleman bootmaker?" said I.

"Oh, if you do not want the articles, I will countermand the orders."

"Very well, see that you do it, or else take them yourself! it is right you should have a little trouble for being so officious."

I spent several days in New Orleans, and was delighted with the city, its sights, and the climate. The weather was beautiful, just warm enough to be comfortable, and as everything was new to me, I enjoyed myself beyond my anticipation. I generally rode out through the day, and at night visited some theatre, ball, or masquerade.

Thus had passed my time for a week, when, one morning, feeling rather the worse for wear, to use a common phrase, I kept my bed, refused my breakfast, and declined a walk with my friend, who went out alone. I was not ill, only slightly indisposed, and fasting and resting soon

set me right. I arose about one, and having perused the daily journals, was just in the act of dressing for dinner, when Harley burst into my room, pale, excited, out of breath, and covered with dust from head to foot.

"Good Heavens!" cried I, in alarm: "what is the matter? what has happened?"

"I have seen her!" he exclaimed, wildly: "I have seen her! I have seen her! Oh! that I had known she was here before!"

"Seen whom?" asked I, all amazement.

"Yes! yes! yes!" he cried, pressing his temples with both hands, and fixing his eyes upon the ceiling, with an abstracted gaze. "Yes, it is so—it should be so—it shall be so! Yes, it was not for nothing I saw her—there is fate in it: Heaven wills, fortune smiles, and I will follow the beck of destiny, though all the fiends of darkness conspire against me!"

"Are you mad?" cried I, grasping his arm: "if not, speak to me, and answer my question! Whom have you seen?"

"Eh?" he answered, turning his gaze—cold, icy cold, and vacant—full upon me, with a look that thrilled me with horror.

"Speak!" I exclaimed; "put 'speculation' in those eyes, or I shall deem you mad! Harley, my dear friend—Morton Harley—speak to me, rationally, in the name of Heaven!"

"Well," he answered, as the intellect, as we sometimes see the blood, seemed to rush into his face, lighting his whole countenance in an instant: "Well, Harry, you need not speak so loud, and get so excited; for, if absent minded, I am not deaf."

"Pardon me, my friend! I was alarmed, and did not regard the tone in which I spoke. But do tell me what

this strange conduct means! I hope you are playing no more jokes!" I added, rather severely.

"Joke! do you think I could joke on such a subject? Pshaw! the man is a knave—"

"Do you apply that term to me, Mr. Harley?"

—"Who could joke on a matter so near his heart," pursued Harley, finishing the sentence, which another slight absence of mind, or aberration of intellect, had apparently interrupted. "No, no, Harry," he continued—"I did not apply the term to you."

"But, my dear friend, do, for Heaven's sake, tell me what all this means! Are you mad or sane?"

"Sane, Harry—sane! Ah, ha, ha! they wanted to make me out mad, but could not—I was too sane for them—though I may be driven mad yet in consequence."

"Well, then, if you are sane, my friend, prove it, by answering my questions!"

"Speak!"

"Where have you been?'

"In the streets."

"What doing?"

"Running."

"And why did you run?"

"To keep up with the carriage."

"What carriage?"

"The one that contained her."

"Who?"

"VIOLA."

"And pray who is Viola?"

"An angel! my blessing and my bane."

"Pray, drop metaphor, and give me straightforward answers."

"Harry, you are my friend," said Harley, abruptly—"at least I hope so."

"I am, sincerely, your friend."

"Thank you! give me your hand. There! yes, I know, by that pressure, you speak from your heart. Well, being my friend, I will make bold to beg of you a favor."

"You have only to name it."

"Ask no more questions now, but leave me here alone for a couple of hours. I wish to lie down: I am fatigued, and a little excited. There, go! not a word! you can make your toilet in the parlor;" and he gently pushed me from the room, adding, as he closed the door and locked it: "I shall not be down to dinner."

I remembered what my friend had said on the Neptune, that when I saw him in one of his peculiar moods, to leave him alone; and therefore I felt less anxiety about him now than I should otherwise have done. But who was Viola? Was she a reality? or a phantom of the brain, that haunted him at times like a living thing? There seemed, as I have elsewhere remarked, something mysterious about my friend, as if something had occurred in his history which he wished to banish from his mind. I had never succeeded in getting him to go back and touch upon his early life. Whenever I broached the subject, he had always adroitly changed it. In every other respect, he seemed frank and communicative—but on this point he would say nothing, or speak so vaguely, that I learned nothing definite. Was he what he seemed? was his real name Morton Harley? where did he belong? what were his prospects in life? why was he thus roaming about, apparently without other object than a desire for travel? had he parents living?—all these were questions I often asked myself, but could not answer. Money he had in abundance; and he spent it freely; spent much of it in charity; spent it like a man who wished to enjoy the pre-

sent, and let the present drive both the future and the past from his mind.

But who was Viola? "his blessing and his bane." I pondered upon it, as a man always ponders upon mere conjecture—coming out in the end exactly where I set out—knowing no more when I had done than when I began. Sometimes I thought she was real, sometimes ideal; and if the former, that my friend was sane, but troubled; if the latter, that he was not always in his right mind. This was the first time I had ever heard him speak of her, and I felt I would give much to have the mystery solved.

Thus I mused till summoned to dinner.

CHAPTER IV.

HARLEY.

NOTWITHSTANDING Harley had intimated he should be himself again in a couple of hours, I saw no more of him that day. I rapped on the door about nine o'clock in the evening, but getting no answer, concluded not to disturb him. As he had taken my room, I took his, which adjoined it. Once or twice, in the course of the night, I fancied I heard him moan—but it might have been only fancy. I gave Tom orders to be at his door by daylight, and if he came forth, to let me know immediately. I arose at a rather earlier hour than usual, but found Harley's door still locked, and Tom informed me that he had heard no sound within. Then I was tempted to rouse him at once; but finally resolved to wait till noon, in the hope he would ere that time make his appearance. To while away the hours, for I did not feel like going out, I procured Nicholas Nickelby, and had just got deeply interested in that beautiful production of Dickens, when suddenly I became aware that some one was looking over my shoulder. I turned, and, to my great relief, beheld Harley.

"You think my two hours have been rather long, eh?" he said, with a smile, all traces of wildness and excitement having disappeared.

"Rather long, truly, my friend; but I am rejoiced to see you yourself once more," I answered. "Pray tell me what was the matter with—"

"How do you like Dickens?" he interrupted.

"Much: in fact, so far as I have read, I am delighted."

"And how many of his works have you read?"

"This is the first I have ever seriously attempted."

"Indeed!"

"Yes! I glanced over a few pages of Oliver Twist, some years ago, but threw it down in disgust."

"Why so?" he asked in surprise.

"Because I thought it trash."

"Ah! my dear Harry, that was because you did not read far enough to discover, that below that light, trifling, superficial surface, lay a mine of rich, pure, earnest thought. Your error consisted in mistaking the froth for the substance. And in this regard you are not alone. There are very many who do not like Dickens, for the reason that they do not understand him. They take up one of his books as you did, read a little here and a little there, throw it down, and pronounce the writer silly. Why? Because, in nine cases out of ten, they mistake the language of one of his foolish characters for his own. And Dickens introduces foolish characters for a purpose; he does it for contrast; he does it to show society as it is; he does it to ridicule certain customs, manners, personages, and institutions, which are obnoxious to every sensible mind. Suppose he attempted this in essays—who would read them? Of the millions who now mentally devour his every thought—liking what he likes—abhorring what he abhors—so that his ideas frame public opinion, the strongest law of all laws,—how many, think you, would have heard of him, had he attempted logic only? instead of sketching with his pen, quaint, homely, life-pictures, which do not clog the brain with abstruse metaphysics, but hang up in the mind's vision, to be seen at all times without an effort? I like Dickens, Harry, for several reasons. His power over the human mind has been used to effect a noble purpose, that of ame-

liorating the condition of thousands of his fellow creatures. He has brought home to the rich and titled, the sufferings, the miseries, of those poor, oppressed, down-trodden beings, whom they have been taught as a virtue to scorn and despise; and he has done this in a way that has told upon their hearts and consciences. He has shown them that vice may be wrapped in silks and broadcloths, and virtue in rags; he has shown them that under the poorest garments may beat hearts great and noble—may live affections pure, true and holy; that the roughest casements may enclose intellects grand, gigantic, god-like. All this has he done—for this I like him—and for this he deserves his fame. He has his faults—who has not? They say in private life he is an aristocrat—what of that? His *private* life belongs to himself—with that we have no business; his public sayings are ours—they belong to the masses—the whole human race—and they are purely democratic."

"Well," replied I, "after this, I shall read Dickens with a new interest—an interest aside from mere amusement. If his productions are what you represent them, I have done him great injustice."

"Read, Harry, and judge for yourself," replied Harley.

"Well, my friend, since you have expressed your opinion thus freely in regard to one author, pray give me your views of authors in general."

"Why, my dear fellow, I scarcely know how or where to begin; in fact, I am not sure I understand what you require."

"I mean that you take up one author after another, and say what you think of their writings."

"Novelists?"

"Ay, and poets also."

"The task is too tedious for the present, Harry; and, besides, I do not profess to be a critic."

"And if you did, I should not care for your opinion; for then you would harp upon their faults, merely to show your own superiority. But, letting that pass, what do you think of novels collectively? their effect upon society?"

"Good in the main, though liable to abuse, both by writers and readers. A novel, if properly written, is a true picture of life as it exists, or did exist, at the time and place where the scene is laid; and though professing to be fiction, it is as much a living fact as a painted landscape is a fac-simile of nature. History gives us only the skeleton of great events—often erroneous ones at that—while historical fiction not only presents the skeleton to our view, but clothes upon it flesh and blood and soul, till it warms into being, and shadows forth the 'form and body of the time.' In it we see the dead resuscitated, and, endowed with life and passion, reacting their several parts, with all their wonted peculiarities. We see not men in the abstract, but living, breathing, human beings, walking the earth as of old, with all their ancient fancies and prejudices, surrounded by the circumstances of their period; and instead of their being brought forward to our time, we go back to theirs; and by the force of imagination find ourselves ever by their side—in city, in forest, in castle—taking part in their pleasures and their griefs, their loves and their hates; and thus do we understand them, as in no other manner we could. For instance, should I say to you, there was one Napoleon Buonaparte, a native of Corsica, who, by the force of circumstances, rose from obscurity to be the Emperor of France, and went forth with great armies, and made war upon all the nations of Europe, shook kingdoms, made monarchs tremble, became a great conqueror, only to be overthrown and die in exile—you would only know that there had been such a being, who performed such deeds; and the only conception you would

have of him, would be such as you would naturally associate with an emperor and a conqueror; but should I, after telling you this, proceed to describe the personal appearance of this emperor—his manners, his habits, his feelings, his hopes, his fears—relate what he said on this occasion and on that—in fact, lay bare to you all the secrets of his soul—portray his virtues, his vices, his greatness, his littleness—the emperor, the conqueror, the myth, would be lost in the *man*, and you would behold only a breathing, sentient being like yourself. The former, comparatively speaking, would be history—the latter, fiction—so from this you can judge how limited would be the ideas of the masses concerning the past, were fiction altogether destroyed.

"Again, much fiction is not historical, but relates to society as we see it around us; but in many instances it compresses society into so small a space, that we can look upon it in our closet, as upon a correct miniature of a familiar or unfamiliar face. If the novelist is true to his mission, and 'holds the mirror up to nature,' he has the power of doing much good—for he reaches a class which sermons never reach—who read for amusement—but who by this means may be made to imbibe good sentiments and noble principles—may be taught to love virtue and hate vice, and even to put their faith and trust in the Divine Creator; whereas, should one attempt to ding these matters into their ears by abstruse theories, he would be met with ridicule and scorn. Again, much fiction is bad, and has a bad tendency, and this should be condemned, and always is by the discriminating reader, who marks his author as he marks a friend or enemy. The good lives, the bad dies; but nothing that is good in itself should be condemned because it is abused. The man who condemns all novels, because some are bad, is like a man condemning all religion, because a priest or

minister has proved recreant to the faith he professes. Discrimination in reading is worth all the sermons ever preached against reading; and if you can have this well taught, understood, and acted upon, you need not fear the result."

"You put novel reading before me in a new light," I replied; "for I have been always taught to regard it merely as a source of amusement, not as a benefit."

"Suffer me to correct you, Harry. All rational amusement is beneficial both to mind and body; for mind and body are so dependent on each other, that what affects one affects both. Were we to take an infant, put it in chains, and confine it in a narrow prison, it would either wither and die, like a blasted flower, or grow up a weak, sickly, feeble thing, of no use to itself or others; and so, if we chain and imprison the mind to the narrow circle of visible facts, giving it no chance to soar and expand itself in the glorious field of imagination, we render it apathetic and imbecile, and perhaps reduce it below the limited range of a mere brute. God never designed this; for the more healthy, robust, and expansive the mind, the greater its knowledge; the greater its knowledge, the greater its comprehension; and the greater its comprehension, the more will it reverence and glorify its Creator, who is seen in all His works The body must have exercise, the mind amusement; and if the one be healthy and judicious, the other moral and rational, the effect will be to render the man better, wiser, and happier. And now, my dear Harry, what do you think of my sentiments?"

"That they are sensible and correct. But go on! I am anxious to hear you still further."

"Pardon me, my friend, not now," returned Harley, gravely. "I may at some future period, but not now; for,

to tell you the truth, a very weighty matter lays upon my mind."

"Indeed! then why did you not mention it before?"

"For the simple reason, that I wished first to convince you I am calm and sane."

"But, my friend, I have not questioned your sanity."

"Not to day, perhaps; but you did yesterday, and I was too much excited to explain. Now, then, you see I am calm and rational; and I come to you as a friend, to know if you will enlist yourself in my service, and be my companion on a journey prescribed by the hand of fate?"

"Alas!" thought I, "my friend is a little touched;" for the very method he appeared to have taken to convince me of his sanity, now led me to fear his mind was not altogether right. But I determined to satisfy myself on this point by further questions.

"Whither would you have me go?" I asked.

"First to Texas."

"And why to Texas?"

"I wish to meet again with Viola."

"And pray who is Viola?"

"An angel!—But stop! I will drop metaphor, and speak understandingly; for, my dear Harry, I again perceive you doubt of my being all right here;" and he tapped his forehead.

"I doubt?—why, my dear Harley—"

"There, do not deny it," he interrupted; "you know I profess to read the passing thought of almost any mind, and it is certainly not difficult to read one so legibly written on the lineaments of the face as yours."

"Well, then, frankly, I own to the fact," I returned. "I did really begin to fear you were *non compos mentis*."

"I like your candor, Harry; but I regret I have given

you cause to think me of unsound mind," replied my friend, with a sorrowful air.

"But your manner was so strange yesterday, Harley?"

"I know it: I was troubled, excited, but not mad, Harry: no, believe me, I was not mad. I could forgive you for so thinking yesterday, because you have known me but a short time—but what cause have I given you for the same opinion to-day?"

"No other than the simple fact, that you have talked gravely here for some time, merely, as you acknowledge, to convince me you are sane, as if you had some doubts of it yourself."

"Ah! that is true. Well, let it pass. But now, seriously and candidly—do you, or do you not, think I am in my right mind at the present moment?"

"I see no reason to doubt it, other than I have mentioned; in short, I will take your word for it; if *you* say you are, I will believe you."

"Then, positively, I assert I am."

"Enough! I am satisfied."

"I will then proceed in so rational a manner, that you shall have no reason to doubt again. You ask who is Viola? It is no more than right, since I wish you to be my companion on an adventure in which she is concerned, that you should know something of her; but you will pardon me, if I only give you an outline sketch now, and leave the detail, the filling up, to some future period."

My friend paused a few moments, as if to collect his thoughts, and then proceeded with the following story

CHAPTER V.

VIOLA.

"VIOLA ST. AUBURN is the only daughter of a wealthy gentleman, who has of late years resided in the city of Mexico. Previous to his removal thither, he owned and worked a large cotton plantation in the State of Georgia, on which estate Viola was born, some eighteen or nineteen years ago. In youth my father and St. Auburn were friends; but unfortunately both loved the same lady, grew jealous of each other, quarrelled, fought, and my father was carried from the field, as it was supposed at the time, mortally wounded. St. Auburn fled; but learning afterward that my father was likely to recover, he returned, and subsequently married the lady who had innocently been the cause of this rivalry and estrangement. My father never forgave him; and to this day the name of St. Auburn—no matter where, by whom, nor how casually mentioned in his hearing—always puts him in a sort of frenzy, which threatens the most serious consequences. In our family it is a prohibited word, and is never spoken in the presence of my father, who, though not exactly insane, is judged to be of unsound mind by those who know him best; and this slight aberration of intellect is thought to date from his recovery and the loss of his first love. Some say that I inherit my father's failings—but of that anon. As to St. Auburn, though the successful rival of my father, I believe he still hates the latter as much as on the day he lodged a bullet in his side—at least he never

made any overtures of reconciliation, and ever since has been known to shun, with a kind of horror, all persons bearing the name of Harley. With this little prelude, Harry, you will better understand what follows.

"It is about three years since I first saw Viola St. Auburn. I had finished my collegiate course, and was on a visit to a cousin of mine in Virginia. In the place where he resided was a female seminary; and in the rear of this seminary, was a rather wild, romantic wood, through which, over a rocky bed, dashed a little stream of pure water. I am rather of a romantic turn at times; and one of my chief delights, during the short stay with my kinsman, had been to steal off by myself, and angle in this stream for trout. There was a quiet, picturesque beauty about this retreat, that pleased me more than any spot I had ever seen; and never had my enjoyment been greater and purer, than when seated on my favorite rock, with a leafy canopy above my head, a warm, clear blue sky over that, and the flashing, leaping, murmuring waters at my feet. Here, pole in hand, and line in water, I used to sit for hours, alone, undisturbed, and lost in a kind of poetic reverie.

"Well, it chanced one day, while seated on my favorite rock, that I heard a footstep behind me. I turned my head, without changing my position, and beheld what seemed to me, in my peculiar frame of mind, a Peri just dropped from Paradise. But to speak more directly to the point, I saw a beautiful maiden, over whose fair, sunny countenance some fifteen or sixteen summers had passed. To her personal appearance I cannot do justice, even now; therefore, suffice it to say, it was such as to rivet my gaze, enchant me, hold me spell-bound, magnetize me, or what you will. I saw before me an airy, floating form, a heavenly face, all guileless and innocent, around which

dangled golden curls, and eyes whose softness and lustre exceeded my most perfect ideal creations; and I saw and thought of nothing else. In one hand she carried a collection of bright flowers, and to one arm her bonnet or hood was attached by the strings. She did not see me, for her eyes were mostly bent on the earth: she was looking for more flowers. I dared not speak nor move, lest I should break the spell, and cause her to vanish like a spirit—for I could not at the moment call up sufficient reason to satisfy myself that she was only mortal.

"Gradually she drew near the rock, and at last stood at its very base. It was high; and as I was sitting below its summit, on the opposite side, I could not now see her without changing my position. I attempted to do so without noise; but my pole slipped, and splashed in the water, just as I had brought my eyes once more to bear upon her. She heard it—it startled her—and taking a step or two backward, she looked up timidly. Our eyes now met for the first time; and with a cry of alarm, she turned to flee.

"'Stay, beautiful creature! one moment stay!' cried I, leaping from the rock, intending to give chase; for I was so excited and bewildered, I knew not what I did.

"She stopped; and turning toward me, pale and trembling, exclaimed, in tones of fear:

"'Oh, sir, do not harm me!'

"'Harm thee, sweet angel!' cried I: 'when I do, may Heaven desert me? Harm *thee?* If ever such a thought enters my brain, I will instantly send my soul to judgment!'

"'Oh, sir,' she rejoined, still trembling, and as much alarmed as ever, for my wild manner was not very well calculated to reassure her: 'Oh, sir, if you do not intend to harm me, let me go! For I do not know you--and—and—and I am afraid.'

"'Oh, do not go yet! not just yet!' I pleaded. 'Stay,

if only for a few minutes, and let me tell you how much I love you! No, no,' pursued I, beginning to gather my senses once more, as I saw her start, draw herself up proudly, and blush to the temples: 'No, no, I did not mean *you*—pardon me!—I meant *flowers:* let me tell you how much I love flowers! and these you have are so very, very beautiful.'

"Had they been weeds, noxious weeds, they would have seemed beautiful to me then.

"She now appeared less alarmed; and casting her eyes —those large, soft, lustrous eyes—upon the ground, replied, with the most perfect *naivete:*

"'*I, too, love flowers.*'

"Had she spoken for an hour, with an eloquence never equalled, I could not have been more charmed than by that simple sentence—those four little words—'*I, too, love flowers.*' Methinks I hear them now, as they dropped in silvery melody from her ruby lips. Yes, I do hear them now, and shall ever hear them, till this heart has ceased to beat. Her whole soul spoke in those words—a soul pure, guileless, true. It is useless to attempt to describe my feelings then; they cannot be described; you might as well attempt to paint the sun's heat. I can only say, I felt I could worship the ground she stood on. It was some time ere I could add anything to what I had already said; not, in fact, till, with an embarrassed look, she turned to leave me; then again I found my tongue.

"'Stay, thou *mortal spirit!* thou fairy thing of earth!' I began; and then bethinking myself, I changed my language and manner, and added: 'Stay, lady! I beseech you! I wish to speak of flowers;' and forthwith I summoned all my floral knowledge to my aid, and went off in a strain of passionate, poetic fervor—speaking, to the best of my recol-

lection, on the subject named—but surely thinking of nothing but the living subject before me—the flower which must eventually bloom in Paradise.

"How long I thus went on—or how long I might have continued, had I been left to finish of my own accord—I cannot say; but I was interrupted in a silvery voice, which said:

"'You must excuse me, sir! I have already overstayed my time, and fear to remain here a moment longer.'

"'But tell me,' said I, 'who you are, and where you belong! for we must meet again.'

"'My father is a merchant, in the city of Mexico,' she replied, 'and I am here attending the seminary. There! hark! I hear the bell. Oh, sir, I must fly! and I shall even then be too late.'

"'But you will come here again for flowers? I shall meet you again here!' I said, earnestly. 'Oh, do not hesitate!—say yes—and I will have prepared for you a beautiful bouquet!'

"'I do not know,' she replied, hurriedly, changing color. 'I fear it would not be right; my teacher—I—that is—perhaps—I will think of it. There, I must go; good-bye, sir;' and she bounded away, with an airy fleetness which soon took her from my sight.

"As for me, my first impulse was to follow her; but for once *propriety* came to my aid; and I remained, gazing on the spot where her form was last seen, and wondering if ever so bright a thing would cross my vision again. How I passed the day, I never knew; but I did not return to my cousin's till night; and was then so absent-minded as to answer his question concerning my success in such a way as to lead him to fear I was suffering under partial derangement.

"I had forgotten to ask the fair unknown her name;

but I remembered my promise, and thought it must be Flora, and so fixed it in my mind. The next day I was up, bright and early, culling flowers, while yet the dew lay n the grass.

"But not to weary you, let it suffice, that the maiden and I met on the same spot; and so continued to meet for more than a month; but it was not till the fourth meeting that we exchanged names, and I learned that she was called Viola St. Auburn. A few hurried questions and answers, now put us both in possession of the painful truth that our fathers were deadly enemies. But we learned it too late. Both loved; and the very fact that we now knew we might never be allowed to meet again, should our secret become known to the friends of either party, only served to fan the flame, and make our attachment little less than a frenzied passion. A slave to impulse, I would have married Viola at once, and braved the consequences; but she, more rational than I, would not consent to a step so rash.

"'Morton,' she replied, one day, on my making the proposition to her, 'that I love you with my whole soul, I do not deny; but what you propose is folly. I am young, and perhaps do not know my own mind. We must wait; a misstep now might render us both miserable for life. Know this, I will wed no other; but without my father's consent, which you are not very likely to obtain, I will not consent to become yours, till I have seen my eighteenth birth-day.'

"'And then, Viola?' exclaimed I.

"'Well, then—if—that is—but we will speak of that another time,' she answered.

"I have said that we met daily for more than a month; and during this time the secret of our meeting remained undiscovered. But at length it was found out, and reached

the ears of Viola's preceptress. She, being a prudish old maid, was filled with indignant horror; and the father of Viola arriving in the village about the same time, to see his daughter, the matter was communicated to him, with false and exaggerated details. You can judge of his rage, on learning that Viola had met, clandestinely, the son of his most bitter enemy. He sought me out, and scrupled not to insult me in the grossest manner. Had he been other than Viola's father, he would never have lived to repeat his words. As it was, I bore all in the best manner I could. He said that rather than his daughter should wed me, a detested Harley, he would see her consigned to the tomb. Not satisfied with this, he wrote an insulting letter to my father, which put him in a rage, and rendered him a raving maniac for several weeks. Viola was then removed, I knew not whither, and I went home. Our brief period of happiness seemed passed, to return no more.

"I will pass over the interview between my father and myself, on the return of his reason. Enough to say, it was terrible. I will not repeat the remarks of my relations, who considered themselves disgraced through me; for I am of a race who clan by blood, subscribe to family feuds, nurse revenge, to be glutted by their posterity on the posterity of their enemies, and who regard an insult to one of their name, as an insult to all, and no disgrace equal to that of settling a quarrel other than by blood.

"Picture to yourself, Harry, how I was received, when it became known that I had ever seriously thought of uniting myself by marriage to the daughter of my father's enemy! Why, would you believe it, my friend, I was actually afraid of assassination—for they would sooner have killed me, than had me wed Viola; and it was only by accident I discovered a plot, whereby I was to be trapped into such peculiarity of speech, (they understood my nature

and how to work on it,) that two physicians in attendance would be able to give the necessary papers for my commitment to a mad-house. But I knew their kind intent in time to foil them ; and foil them I did, to their chagrin and dismay ; for I turned the tables on them ; and had I followed up my advantage, they would have found the consequences very serious.

"Well, to pass on, I made an arrangement with my father, to give me my portion in money. This sum I safely invested ; and the interest, which is paid me semi-annually in this city, is sufficient for all my expenses.

"Six months after leaving home—which I did with the hope that travelling, change of scene, and amusement of various kinds, would tranquillize my mind—I again saw Viola. You, Harry, would say we met by accident ; so would most persons. But, sir, it was *not* by accident. No, so surely as there is a Power above us, I believe our meeting was by the hand of destiny ; there is a fate dividing and uniting us. It happened thus : I was passing through an inland town in Tennessee, where there was a large female seminary. I stopped beside the gate, which opened into a beautiful enclosure, to look at the building and admire the surrounding scenery. A female brushed past me, and put her hand upon the gate. In the act of opening it, she turned her head. Our eyes met. It was Viola. What followed, beyond her fainting in my arms, I must tell you some other time—at least not now. Suffice it, for the present, that I promised to leave her, and not to seek her again till she had passed her minority. She said that, should her father learn we had met again, it might cost her her life—that was argument enough for me.

"Well, since then, I have been an unhappy wanderer—gay at times, to the height of folly—gloomy, at times, to

a depth of despair bordering on madness. But, Harry, you know what I am; though, my dear friend, I must in justice say, I have been more like myself during our brief companionship, than for a long time previous. I look upon you as a friend—you must remain my friend. Yes, I read you aright—you will. God bless you! I will make you my confidant: I am doing so now: you are the first. Pardon me these tears! Do not think me weak because I weep; but you know not what a blessing it is to have a friend to whom you can unbosom yourself—into whose sympathizing soul you can pour your pent up griefs, and take counsel in return. You do not know the value of such a friend, because you have never felt the need of one: your life has been sunshine—mine storm.

"Ere you and I met on the boat at Louisville, I had resolved on going to Mexico. For two reasons. That I might have some wild, exciting adventures, and again see Viola. I had not seen her since we parted in Tennessee; and I doubted not, her education finished, she had gone home to her father. I knew she was now of age; and, if such a thing were possible, I was resolved on seeing her, and leaving the rest to fate.

"But fate has favored me. I saw her yesterday, when I least expected it. Do you wonder I was excited? Were you me, would you have been less so? She passed me in a carriage. It was going fast, and I only caught a bare glimpse of her features as she went by. But two years had not altered them beyond my recognition, though time has done much in her favor. She is more mature—more in bloom—is paler, and more spiritual.

"Well, I followed that carriage,—how?—let my garments, soiled with dust and mud, answer. It stopped on the Levee; and I saw the idol of my dreams—the object of my hopes and fears—escorted on board a steamer by

her father. I went aboard. Fate still favored me. Her father left her side for a couple of minutes, and I made myself known. She almost fainted, but recovered.

" 'Not a word,' she gasped, 'or we are lost! Go—my father—Galveston.'

" She could articulate no more. I saw her father returning; and merely saying, I will be there, I turned away.

" Harry, my friend, another steamer goes out to-day at four o'clock. I leave on that. Will you go with me?"

" I will," cried I.

" God bless you! your hand!" and as my friend wrung it heartily, I saw his eyes fill with tears.

Two hours later, Morton Harley and your humble servant, reader, were steaming it down the Mississippi to the Gulf—bound for Galveston, Texas—and, as the sequel proved, for some rather strange and thrilling adventures.

CHAPTER VI.

PERPLEXITY AND MYSTERY.

It was on a fine, beautiful morning, that we landed at Galveston, and had our luggage transferred to one of its most flourishing hotels. The place seemed lively; and there were two or three companies of soldiers parading the streets, prior to their departure to join the Army of Occupation, at Corpus Christi, under Taylor. Citizens were abroad in large numbers, and a good deal of enthusiasm prevailed, as was natural there should, considering that Texas, after a hard, bloody, and lonely struggle of years, had recently been annexed to our great American Republic, and these soldiers were on the eve of joining Taylor's gallant band, now on her southern frontier, to protect her against the hostile invasion of her bitter foes, the Mexicans.

On our way hither, much of the conversation between Harley and myself had been concerning Viola; in fact, she was the subject which ever lay uppermost in his mind; and now, the ice being broken, he spoke with unreserved freedom, made me his confidant in everything, sought my advice, and I became a participator in all his hopes and fears. But one thing troubled both of us. If she had come to Galveston, as he inferred from her broken language on the boat she intended to do, how were we to find her? Had she relations here? She might have, but Harley knew of none, and therefore was at a total loss for any clue to her present whereabouts. The more we pondered

upon the matter of finding her, the more perplexing it grew, till at last Harley declared it was useless to spend our breath in mere conjecture, and that we must leave all to Fate, in which, as I have shown, he was a firm believer.

"Well, my friend," said I, as we arrived at the hotel alluded to, "we are here at last; and now what do you propose? Shall we sit quietly down, and trust to *Fate* to accomplish our desires? Or shall we begin an active search for the object of our solicitude?"

"Ay, Harry, there is the difficulty; how, where, or in what manner *can* we begin a search for her?"

"Well, an idea has struck me. It is not improbable that, if Viola and her father have come hither at all, they have put up at some of the hotels; and it would perhaps be as well to begin with the registers, and make inquiries."

"By Jove, Harry, you are right!" cried Harley, grasping my hand; "how dull I am not to have thought of it before. Come, let us begin at once;" and we did so accordingly.

Our first inquiry, of course, was at the hotel where we were stopping. The clerk remembered no such persons, and there was no St. Auburn on the register. We repaired to another, and met with like success. At the third, to our great joy, we found recorded Henry St. Auburn and daughter.

"Harry," said Harley, grasping my arm, his face pale with emotion, "you must find out if they are now here; and if not, whither they have gone. I will sit down—I feel faint."

A few minutes sufficed to get all the knowledge concerning the St. Auburns which the obliging landlord possessed. Such persons had been there, stopped one day, and had gone North, but whither he could not say. I reported to Harley.

"So, being gone, I am a man again," he replied, in the language of Macbeth. "Harry," he continued, starting up almost wildly, "I *feared* they were here; and now that they are not, I would give a handsome sum they were—so inconsistent are we human puppets. Well, we must follow them; it is something to be on their trail, as the hunters say; and see Viola again, I must; and, Heaven help me! I will."

"But how are we to follow," I rejoined, "when we know not which way they went?"

"Man, we do know they went to the North—did not the landlord tell you so? and, by my hopes of earthly happiness! I will search the North, though it be to the ice-bound pole, but I will find Viola!"

"Now, Harley, you are getting excited again. I pray you be calm."

"Well, and so I am—but what would you have me do? Sit quietly here, when, for aught I know, she needs my protecting arm? She bade me come to this city: I have done so: and by that same token, she bids me follow till I find her"

"But what do you propose to do?"

"Set off northward, and use my tongue. Zounds! Harry, what were tongues made for but to ask questions? legs but to run? and arms but to fight? all of which I will use in the cause of her I love, if necessary, so help me Heaven! Why, my dear fellow, you, who not an hour since counselled me to activity, would surely not gainsay your advice now?"

"By no means; but I counselled you to begin systematically; you did so, and the result is that we have found a trace of her we seek."

"Well?"

"Well, let us continue as we have begun."

"What have I asked for else?"

"Why, from your manner, I inferred you were about to set off, madman like, to hunt the country over, as if in search of a lost animal."

"Come, come," replied Harley, good humoredly, "a joke is a joke; 'but no more of that, Hal, an thou lovest me.' Now tc begin seriously. They left for the North—good—consequently have gone up the Bay, or crossed over to the mainland by ferry. Now I wager you what you dare, that I find out which, ere I quit this hotel."

"Well, now at least you are talking rationally, and conducting yourself in a sensible manner. Come, here is the landlord—let us settle the matter."

The latter, on being requestioned, replied that, at the time the parties left, he was absent; but the porter, who had the handling of the luggage, would probably know something of them. The porter was called; and from him we learned that persons answering the description Harley gave of Viola and her father, had left two days before, in a private carriage, and crossed over to the mainland; but what direction they had taken thence, or what place was to be their destination, he could not say.

"You see," said Harley to me, triumphantly, "we have the right starting point, and that is everything in a case like this. Of what color were the horses and carriage, porter?"

"Well, sir, the horses were sorrel, sir, with two white stars right in front of their foreheads, sir."

"And the carriage?"

"Was a big, lumbering thing, so'thing like a hackney, sir, only it wasn't a hackney."

"But the color?"

"It was painted dark green, and had yaller streaks round it, and on the doors was painted two picters."

"What were the pictures like?"

"Well, they wasn't like anything I ever seen afore, sir; there was a heap o' things all kind o' jumbled up together."

"Were the pictures alike?"

"Yes, sir, I reckon they was."

"Should you judge them to be a coat-of-arms?"

"Well, they mought be—though I don't exactly know how a coat-of-arms looks."

"It was a private carriage, then?"

"Yes, sir, I said so; and the owner was with it, I reckon: leastways there was a gentleman inside, as got out and helped the lady in, and then got in agin with the tother gentleman."

"The lady, you say, was young?"

"Yes, sir, and so handsome! I've seen a good many handsome ladies, one time and another, but she beat 'em all. Poor thing! I pitied her, I did."

"Pitied her? why so?"

"'Cause she looked so sad and troubled, and seemed to feel so bad."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Harley, beginning to grow very much excited. "Indeed? say you that? Did she not seem pleased at leaving with the strange gentleman?"

"Oh, dear, no, sir—quite the contrary: she kept looking all round, as if she was thinking about gitting away—leastways I thought so; and arter she'd got in, I seen her cover her face with her handkercher."

"By my hopes! this is strange!" exclaimed Harley. "What do you think of it, Harry?"

"I do not know what to think," I replied.

"Perhaps her father is about forcing her to marry some one she detests," returned my friend, uneasily. "Let him, if he dare!" he pursued, setting his teeth hard, and

hissing out the words, while his eyes shone with a wild light. "Ay, sir, let him! he shall find another Harley as implacable a foe as the first. If he wrong her, though he be her father, he shall answer for it with his heart's blood!"

"Morton!" cried I, perceiving that my friend was fast working himself into a frenzy; "remember where you are, and control your passion! You may be all wrong in your conjectures."

"More likely right, Harry; though I will take your advice, and be calm now, for it is necessary to my purpose. But only let me know he has misused her, and he will find that he who bore his insults for her sake once, will remember old scores in the final settlement. Well, porter, this carriage—have you no idea to whom it belongs, and where it came from?"

"No, sir—never saw it afore."

"Did it stop here any time?"

"Not more'n ten or fifteen minutes, sir. It was driv up by a white chap in livery; and the gentleman as had the young lady, 'pear'd to be looking for't; for he went right up to the door, and spoke to him that was inside; then he hurried back into the house; and a little arter the young lady came down stairs, and got in, as I told you; while I put on the baggage, two trunks and a carpet-bag."

But little more of importance was elicited from the porter; and Harley, putting a half-dollar in his hand, dismissed him.

"Harry," said my friend, grasping my hand, as we gained the street—"can I depend on you?"

"To the death."

"Again I repeat, God bless you! You know I promised you adventure; and now, methinks, we are about to have it, though of a different kind to that I then antici-

pated. Hark you! I am satisfied there is some dark plot against Viola; I am convinced her father is base enough for anything; and I am determined to find and bear her off, in spite of him or aught human."

"And you may count on my assistance," replied I, already taking a deep interest in one I had never seen. "But, Morton, we have much to do, I think, and something must be done first—what shall it be?"

"The first thing to be done, Harry, is to find Viola."

"True—but how shall we set about it?"

"We must trace that carriage by inquiry."

"True again; but shall we ride, or set off afoot?"

"Well, as to that, give me your advice."

"Then," said I, "I think we had better leave our luggage where it is for the present, and take only such things as can be put into a valise or carpet-bag, which Tom can carry, and begin our search on foot. We shall thus be more likely to get the information we want; and when obtained, if direct and important, we can always hasten our progress, by hiring such conveyance on the road as will best accelerate it—and this plan will leave us without other care than for ourselves."

"You are right, Harry; your advice is good, and I will act upon it. But when shall we set out? I am impatient, you see."

"In an hour, if you like. I am ready, and, truth said, impatient also to be on the road."

My friend grasped my hand again, and wrung it heartily.

"Harry," he said, tears starting into his eyes, "it was a blessed day for me on which Fate brought us together. I am not ungrateful—as, if we both live, I will some time prove to you. Oh, Viola! if I could have received one word from her relative to this mystery! But I will solve

it, or die in the attempt. How unfortunate, Harry, there was no way of getting here sooner than we did; but perhaps it is all for the best; though could I have had one minute's uninterrupted conversation with her—"

My friend stopped suddenly; his eyes dilated, grew wild, and became fixed on some distant object; a singular look of hope and fear lighted his pale countenance; and merely adding, "Wait for me!" he bounded away down the street, as if life and death depended on his fleetness.

As much as I had seen of his strange manner, this proceeding, I must confess, startled me, while it excited my curiosity; and I started after him—not to overtake him—but, if possible, to keep him in sight. I soon lost trace of him in a crowd that was collected before a public building, which I ascertained was the post-office. After vainly searching for him some ten or fifteen minutes, I concluded to return to our hotel, thinking I should be likely to find him there sooner than elsewhere. On reaching the steps that led up to the portico, what was my surprise, to see Harley come bounding down to meet me. His eyes glared like a madman's, and his features were distorted with excitement.

"Quick, Harry!" he cried, grasping my arm—"I have been nearly wild to see you. Why did you not stay where I left you? Up stairs, quick! to a private chamber."

"In Heaven's name! what has happened? what is the matter?" exclaimed I, as I rushed up stairs with him, two at a time, leaving a crowd behind to stare after us, and wonder at our excitement.

"In here!" cried Harley, darting into a bed-chamber; and as I crossed the threshold, he shut the door and locked it.

"Are you really mad, Harley?" cried I, growing alarmed in earnest.

"No, no, Harry—not mad—but terribly excited. I can hardly contain myself. Joy and rage are strange feelings to clash in one's breast. Ah, fate! fate! triumphant to the last! It was a happy thought—blessed thought! and I could shout for joy, and at the same time say, 'Let him beware!' But I am keeping you wondering, when this, this, this, will explain the mystery;" and Harley thrust into my hand a letter, and throwing himself upon the bed, added: "Read! read!"

I was not long in following his injunctions, as the reader will readily believe. One glance at the epistle and I comprehended all. It ran thus:

"Dear Morton—We meet strangely—we have from the first—and since I saw you on the boat at New Orleans, I have thought there may be such a thing as a special Providence. Oh, Morton, if you love me—if you ever loved me—forsake me not now! Till I saw you last, despair had for months sat like an incubus upon my heart. Hope had fled me, and in vain I labored to lure her back. She came with you; and since then has fluttered in sight, but ready to take wing and leave me forever. You, Morton, and hope, are so united, that neither can come alone. Oh, misery! misery! how well I know the meaning of the term! What shall I say of the past? I could pour out my soul to you in words, were we together; but I can say nothing on paper. Yet something I must say. My mother is dead. My father—oh! that he better deserved the name!—what shall I say of him? Morton, to be brief, my father has *sold* me to a man I detest, and is now on his way to deliver me to my *purchaser*. In other words, and to speak without enigma, my father, having failed in business, is resolved to retrieve his fortune by disposing of my hand to a French count, who boasts of a distant connection with

Louis Philippe. He is rich, and owns a country seat somewhere near the Brazos; but I cannot direct you to it, nor do I even know the vicinity. I only know it is called D'Estang Ville. You may perhaps find it from the name —that is, should you care to trouble yourself about it. Thither I am to be transported; and once there, my father has solemnly sworn I shall become the wife of D'Estang, or take the alternative of ending my days in a convent, in the interior of Mexico. Of the two, my choice is already made. I will never wed this count. Morton, my hope is in you, or death. If you fail me, the latter may not. I would not die now—but can I live a life of misery? I have knelt and prayed to my father to forego his terrible resolve. In vain. He is inexorable. Oh! how he has changed of late! He is another being. Mother and wealth were his idols. One is dead—the other lost; and now he would rebuild his fortunes on the crushed hopes and broken heart of his only child. He cannot love me, Morton, and I have learned to fear him. Could he have loved my mother? If so, why am I treated thus? Of M. D'Estang—he once visited my father in the city of Mexico. I was then a child—but it seems he conceived a passion for me even then, which years have strengthened rather than weakened. I say passion; for had he ever *loved*, he would not *buy* me like a slave now. How he and my father met within a year, and how one bought and the other sold me, I cannot tell you now—perhaps I may when we meet, should God permit us to meet again on earth. My hand trembles, and tears dim my eyes. Morton, dear Morton, I cannot write more. I have stolen away to do this. Will it ever reach you? and can you assist me if it does? Oh, Morton, by the sweet past! by our then happy hopes of the future! I conjure you to come to my aid! But you must come disguised. If seen and recognised, I

verily believe your life will be taken. It is fearful to think so, Morton—it is terrible! No more.

"Your own, VIOLA.

"P. S.—Since writing the foregoing, I have seen my father, and learned that M. D'Estang is to meet us here, and that we are to leave in his private carriage. May Heaven help me! V."

This letter was written in a neat, but trembling hand, and it seemed as if the writer had often paused to give vent in tears to the grief of her overcharged soul. In fact, in more than one place, there was a slight stain, as if tears had fallen on the paper. Poor Viola! from my soul I pitied her; and I silently vowed I would save her or perish in the attempt.

"Well," cried Harley, the moment I had finished its perusal—"what think you now? You see my conjecture was right. Ah, sir, the heart is often before reason in its own affairs. Well, Harry, do you blame me now for being excited?"

"No," said I; "but how came you by this letter?"

"I will tell you in a word. While I stood talking with you, my eye chanced to light upon the post-office; and, blessed idea! I thought it possible Viola had written. That thought was almost maddening; I could not stop to explain; I rushed away, and you know the rest. But come! come! we waste time here. We now have a clue to Viola's whereabouts; and I solemnly swear to set her free, or leave my bones upon the soil of Texas! Poor Viola! what has she not suffered! And such a *father!* 'Sdeath! Harry, I must not think, or I shall unfit myself to act. Come, now to the purpose. We must change our first plan of travelling as gentlemen, and take to an humble calling.

What say you to an itinerant occupation? what say you to that of a peddler?"

I agree to anything, Harley, that will enable as to accomplish our design. As to turning peddler, I like the idea; for in this capacity, our real motives will not only be effectually concealed, but we can travel in what manner we please, without exciting impertinent curiosity, and can force ourselves among rich and poor, high and low, and see society exactly as it is."

"You are right in that, Harry; and I have often thought that but for the name of it, I should like the calling; for instead of beholding society continually from one point of view, as one beholds the representations of the stage, we could thus, as it were, step behind the scenes, and see the actors as they really are. Of all men, to understand human nature, give me the humble itinerants; for where we, as gentlemen, see society already made up, they see the making up; and what from our point of observation looks gold and silver, they, from a closer inspection, know to be only tinsel. The man or woman who would greet us with smiles and flattery, in our proper characters, would perhaps turn from us with scorn, should we present ourselves to them as peddlers; and yet we and they would be the same individuals, with the same souls, the same thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears—the only difference being in position—to them the all important consideration of life; and as you observe, we should see them as they are, for the simple reason that before objects so humble there would be no necessity of wearing masks. Oh! the mockeries, mummeries, trickeries, and deceits of mankind, Harry, would make misanthropes of such as you and I, when once initiated into the secret extent of hypocrisy, were it not that in finding out the bad, where we looked for something better, we discover by the same means so much

that is good and deserving, which else had remained unknown, like flowers that struggle upward among weeds, but never reach the sunshine. But come! come! we must not stop now to indite homilies or moralize. We have work before us—let us be up and doing."

And forthwith we set about preparing for our new vocation.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISGUISE.

NOTWITHSTANDING we were very diligent, employing every moment, it was late in the day when we were ready to set out on our journey. By this time, however, every thing was prepared; and having donned a plain suit, and packed our more costly wearing apparel in our trunks, which we consigned to the care of our landlord; and having procured a couple of peddler's boxes for jewelry, and laid in a tolerably fair stock for trade or show, which we gave in charge of Tom, together with a well-filled valise of clothing necessary to a change; we procured a conveyance to a small village on the mainland, which we reached just as the setting sun was streaming across Galveston Bay, and turning its waters to gold. We drove to the principal inn of the village, ordered supper, and put up for the night.

"To-morrow," said Harley, gaily, as together we sat at the tea-table: "To-morrow, Harry, we begin our adventures in reality; at least we begin a new business; and I am as impatient to be on the road, as ever a child was to see new toys. By my faith, Harry, I sometimes think we are as much children at five-and-twenty as at five—the only difference being, that we are older, and larger, and require bigger play-things. I wonder what kind of a salesman I shall make. Faith! I see myself at it now. 'Some very extra fine jewelry, madam—earrings, brooches, chains, finger rings—very beautiful, I assure you—will you have the

goodness to look at them?' Ha, ha, ha! what do you think of that, Harry, eh! for a commencement? Come, a wager! a wager! if you dare!"

"Name it."

"A week's keeping on the road, that I beat you in to-morrow's profits!"

"Done!" returned I, laughing at the idea that already we were beginning to be *ambitious* to excel in our new vocation. "But, Morton, you will not forget Viola? Remember that profit is less an object with us than speed in our search."

"Ay, true; but I do not forget that. It may be necessary, in order to succeed in our design, that we understand the business we profess, and practice alone will make us perfect. Nor is speed so very important as you might at first thought suppose; for they will not use force with Viola—they dare not; and, without force, she will not wed: no, Harry, nor can she be forced to wed him; she says so much in her letter; and I know her well enough, to feel assured she will keep her word. But still there must be no unnecessary delay; and could my design be accomplished without the means I am about to use—could it in fact be accomplished by speed merely—I would mount the fastest horse in the country, and ride as if for life. Do not think, Harry, because I seem indifferent, that I am not impatient to see her; but my experience in life has taught me the value of prudence; and now that I am about to do battle for a great stake, I feel the need of having all my weapons about me and in good order. Speaking of weapons—do not let us forget, when we retire, to put our revolvers in proper order—for one never knows, in this country, how soon he may want to use them. Yes, Harry, I have a plan—not fully matured, it is true—but when it is, I will make it known to you—by which I hope to outwit two

cunning knaves, and steal the greatest prize our earth contains. If I *do* succeed, and you ever write that book you were speaking of, I bespeak a prominent place in it for my *chef-d'œuvre* of stratagem. By-the-by, I believe you do not speak French?"

"No."

"I am sorry for that. But then—stop! let me see!—yes, that will do as well; you can be a Yankee."

"I do not understand to what you allude."

"You will in good time, never fear;" and Harley relapsed into a reverie, and did not speak again for five minutes, notwithstanding I asked him several questions meantime. His first words were: "But how to dispose of Tom! for he must go with us."

"Oh, Tom will take care of himself; he is easily satisfied," I replied.

"You do not understand me, Harry. I mean in what capacity he is to travel with us; for if as a servant, will people not think it singular that—"

"Not at all," I interrupted; "or if they do, what of it? We may be peddlers; but it does not follow, you know, we must be poor; and why not have a black to carry our boxes? Some may think us a little too aristocratic for our profession—but that will do us no harm."

"Well, perhaps you are right—consider it settled so at all events," replied Harley. "And now, Harry, let us retire to our room. Or, by-the-bye, I wish you would make inquiry concerning that carriage; and if you can find out which course it went from here, I think we shall have no great difficulty in tracing it home."

It was perhaps an hour later, that I repaired to the apartment assigned us for the night. The door was locked. I rapped several times; but receiving no answer, I came to the conclusion that Harley had stepped out, and taken the

key with him. And I was further confirmed in this belief, when, on inquiring at the bar, I was told that my friend had gone up stairs about an hour since, and that some one, no doubt himself, had come down and gone out within a few minutes. I seated myself and took up a newspaper to while away the time till his return. I was just in the middle of a vituperative article on Mexico, in which the writer boldly prophesied the consequences to that distracted country, should she dare go to war with the greatest Nation in the world—that is to say, the Yankee Nation, —when, chancing to turn my head a little, I became aware that some one was looking over my shoulder; and another glance showed me that the new comer was a stranger. Indignant at such vulgar rudeness, I started to my feet, and confronted him with:

"Well, sir, what is it?"

He seemed astonished and alarmed, and instantly stammered out:

"Pardonnez moi! I want not'ing. I was just look at de papeer: vairee sorree I was deesturb monsieur."

I looked him full in the eye, as he spoke, and became satisfied, from its contrite expression, he had erred through ignorance rather than design. He was a young man, apparently under thirty; though his face, lips, and chin were so covered with a black, matted beard, that it was difficult to fix upon his age with any degree of certainty. His skin was as dark as that of a Spaniard; and long, black, matted hair fell down around his shoulders, and completely hid his neck. His eyes were light, I noticed, and had an intelligent expression; and his dress, I did not fail to perceive, was something like my own. He seemed so penitent for having disturbed me, as he expressed it, that I felt my anger vanish in a moment; but still I thought it best not to appear too easily pacified.

"You are a Frenchman, I perceive?" I said.

"Oui, monsieur, at your sarvais."

"The French," I rejoined, "are considered a very polite people; how is it that, being one of them, you could be so rude as to look over a gentleman's shoulder while he was reading?"

"Ten million pardone, monsieur! I was forgeet. I was look at ze papeer, to geet ze nam." I do zo not ageen, I do assure. I not would mak' my contree asham'—but I av not mooch breed a la mode. I was a poor pedleer."

"Ah! so you are a peddler?" returned I, suddenly becoming much interested in my brother chip. "Sit down! never mind what is past: I was a little hasty."

The sudden change in my manner, seemed to make my new acquaintance rather suspicious; for he eyed me curiously; and though he so far complied with my request as to seat himself, yet he managed to leave quite a space between us; and I observed he put his hands in his pockets, as if he feared I might, by some hocus pocus, abstract his money without his knowledge. In order to reassure him, I informed him that I was on the point of adopting his vocation.

"You, monsieur?" he exclaimed; "you was become one pedleer? By gar! I was so mooch astonish nevare. I shall shook your hand off;" and faith I thought he would; for he squeezed and shook it for something less than five minutes: in fact, until I withdrew it, and begged him to reseat himself. "I was so mooch happee, I forgeet," he said, by way of apology.

"What do you sell?" I inquired.

"Jewelry, and sooch tings."

"Jewelry, eh? Why, then, we are both in the same line."

"You sell him, eh? ha! By gar! I was like to shook

your hand ageen, for say zo. But no—I do him not—I might forgeet ze leetle stop."

"Which way are you travelling?" I inquired.

"I was just come from Galveston: I was for to try ze contree up to Brazos riviere."

"Ever been this route?"

"Nevare. I was coome from Nouvelle Orlean on ze boat, one, two day gone by."

"Where do you put up for the night?"

"In zis hotel with monsieur."

"Hum! yes. How do you carry your jewelry?"

"In one leetle box, with strop—zo—under de arm."

"Where is your box?"

"Up stairs. Will monsieur look at him?"

"With pleasure," I answered.

"Will monsieur geet ze light? I show him with mooch delight."

I procured the light, and we went up stairs. To my surprise, the Frenchman stopped at my door; and taking a key from his pocket, applied it to the lock.

"Not here," I said; "you have made a mistake; this is my room."

The Frenchman looked at the number, and replied, with a shrug:

"If meestake, monsieur was mak' him: zis be my lodging, where I keep ze box: Ze key say zo—see!" and with the last word, he threw open the door, adding: "Will monsieur step in, please?"

I went in, looked all around, and assured myself I was not mistaken. It was my apartment; and there, before me, proof positive, were my box and Harley's.

"Well," I said, rather sternly, "are you satisfied now? I told you it was my room before you entered it; now I trust you are convinced."

"But I say zis be my lodging," replied the other; "and see! dare was my varee box;" and going up to one, he commenced fumbling at the key hole.

I was never a person to be trifled with; and suddenly becoming indignant—for I felt my new acquaintance was presuming on my good nature—I seized him by the collar, dragged him back from the box, and exclaimed:

"Sir! what do you mean by persisting in this foolery? Begone! leave the room instantly, or I will throw you down stairs!"

"Why, Harry, you needn't work yourself into such a passion about nothing; I suppose I have a right here as well as you; and *that* box is mine!" said my French acquaintance, in the voice of Morton Harley.

I never was so thunderstruck in my life; I was perfectly dumb with amazement; and for nearly a minute I stood speechless, gazing upon the person before me, but almost doubting still it could be Harley.

"*Is* it you, Morton?" I inquired, at length.

"Well, Harry, it's nobody else," he answered, in a phrase peculiar to the West; "and if you longer doubt, see here;" and he forthwith removed his wig, whiskers, and moustaches, and stood before me Morton Harley indeed, but with his skin discolored by the liquid he had used to change his complexion.

"What shall it be?" I inquired; "I see I am in for it again."

"Oh, never mind the wine this time, Harry. I forgive you a little rough usage, and some harsh words, and you must forgive me the joke. In fact, Harry, it was not intended for a joke; but the most serious earnest; and on its success depended the prosecution of my design. Do you comprehend me?"

"I think I do. But tell me; where and when did you procure this disguise?"

"It was made for me some years ago, and first used while at college, to steal a march on the Faculty. It has been lying in my trunk; but I never showed it to you, for the reason that I wished first to test its virtue, and have some harmless fun at your expense. Henceforth, with Heaven's aid, I dedicate it to a service of momentous importance! I shall not fail to deceive them—eh! Harry?"

"You could deceive your own mother: I never saw an illusion so real."

"Ha! ha! I could now shout for joy. Let them have a care! let them have a care! But the carriage, Harry—you made the inquiry?"

"Yes!"

"Well?"

"At first I could get no trace of it—could find no one who had seen it; but at last I met a stable-boy, leading a horse, who assured me such a carriage had passed him about a mile from here, on the road running northward."

"Bravo! As Bulwer says, 'the night is passing.' Oh, that I knew the future! Come, Harry, let us turn in—for we must be up betimes. Remember the wager!"

"I hope to take some pleasure in reminding you of it to-morrow eve," I replied.

That night I had confused dreams of distressed damsels and French peddlers.

CHAPTER VIII.

INCIDENTS.

The morning rose bright and glorious; and the sun, which here in this delightful climate shines a perpetual summer, now poured a golden flood over awakened nature, making everything look joyous. We are all, in a greater or less degree, the children of nature; and our hearts are apt to feel buoyant when she smiles, and depressed when she frowns or looks gloomy, as the infant prattler takes its cue from its mother.

Harley and I were up betimes; and after breaking our fast, we set out upon our journey, our hearts swelling with a secret, inward exultation, which is at times felt by all, but which language cannot describe.

We had resolved not to begin our new vocation till we were two miles on the road; and Tom was accordingly ordered to follow us at a respectable distance with our boxes. We passed several fine-looking houses, and at length came to a deep wood; when, retiring into a thicket, Harley donned his disguise, which he was determined henceforth to wear, lest some accident might betray him to his enemies.

We now for the first time slung our boxes under our arms; and if we did not look foolish, I certainly for one felt so. I found it was one thing to turn peddler in imagination, and another to be so in reality. Still I braced myself up with the reflection, that it was not for paltry gain I "had taken to the road," but to accomplish a great

purpose; and by dint of much reasoning with myself to this effect, I had almost "screwed my courage to the sticking point," when I chanced to espy Tom, with his back toward me, shaking as if with the ague.

"What is the matter with you?" cried I.

Tom started, turned around, and tried with all his might to look grave and serious; but the desire to laugh overcoming his fear of punishment, he, after displaying sundry contortions of countenance, burst forth in one regular negro "yah! yah!" that might have been heard half-a-mile.

"You—you can lik dis chile, Massa Hal," he said—"bu-but I can't help it—dat de fac'—yah! yah! yah!"

"Well, what in the name of common sense are you laughing at?"

"Why, I was tinking how you look, ef Massa Wal'on, or old Moll seed you now. I neber tink young Massa Harry, de greatest buck in ole Wargin'a, come down to dis."

"I may come down to something worse for you, if you are not careful," I replied, sternly. "Hark ye, boy! laugh your laugh out now; and mind you never betray, by word, look, or sign, that Harley or I are other than we seem, or I will break every bone in your body!"

"Come, Harry," said my friend, "never mind Tom; I know he will be true—or"—and he gave the black a significant look, and pointed to one of his revolvers, which had an instantaneous effect in bringing about a silence. "Come, Harry, let us forward—for I long to be playing my part."

"Ay, and your part is an easy one, compared to mine, Morton."

"How so?"

"Because you will act behind a mask, and so conceal

both your own face and your blushes; while I shall be obliged to expose, to the rude gaze of all I meet, an open, honest, modest countenance, which I fear will be perpetually blushing for what its owner does."

"Well, there is some truth in that," laughed Harley; "but you must console yourself with the reflection, that no one here will know you, and that you will never see your kind patrons but once. Come, the wager! the wager! Faith! I see I shall win without an effort."

"Be not too sanguine," said I, now thinking of nothing but victory; for, from a child up, I was always ambitious to excel in whatever I undertook. "The first house shall be yours, the second mine; and so we will continue, alternately, till we tire of the sport."

"And fail not," returned Harley, "to make inquiry of all you see concerning the carriage, and the location of D'Estang Ville; for some one perchance may know of it; and once discovered, away with all thoughts but those of love and happiness, or despair and revenge."

It was a rich, beautiful country over which we were now passing; and at regular intervals were the dwellings of wealthy planters. At the first of these—a pleasant looking mansion, standing off to the right of the road—Harley stopped; and bidding Tom loiter behind, I went forward to try my luck and test my assurance at the next. The distance between the two was about half a mile; and so occupied was I with thinking of how I should feel and act, and what I should say, that the beauties of a splendid landscape, reposing in the soft sunshine of a lovely day, were unnoticed; and the silvery warblings of hundreds of gay-plumed songsters were unheard.

At length I found myself opposite a modest, genteel residence; but when, after gazing upon it a few minutes, I desperately turned my steps into the neat enclosure in front

thereof, I felt just as I always fancied a man must feel when caught in the act of robbing a neighbor's hen-roost. I kept on, however—at least my feet did—though my heart seemed all the while going backward—and I really debated with myself, whether there would not be a separation between the two by the time I should get there. A couple of negro children were playing near the house; and advancing to them, I inquired, in a tolerably even tone of voice, considering the state of my nerves, if their mistress was at home. The reply was in the affirmative; and summoning all my fortitude for the awful trial, like a man who is going to be hung, I found myself at the door—though to this day I have no distinct recollection of how I got there.

I knocked.

"Come in," said a sharp voice; and the next moment, trembling from head to foot, with perspiration standing all over me in drops, I found myself in a neat, genteel apartment, where a pale, thin-lipped, sharp-featured, starchy-looking lady sat tying a ribbon around a sombrero.

I remember this distinctly; and how I wondered, at the time, if that would ever shade such a sneaking, hangdog-looking countenance, as I fancied and *felt* mine at that mo ment must be.

"Well?" said the woman, sharply, eyeing me suspiciously from head to foot.

"Madam, I—"

"We don't want to buy anything, sir."

"You mistake me," I stammered, feeling the hot blood of shame and confusion rush to my face, till I thought the heated veins would burst. I—I—called, madam—for—*a drink of water.*"

"Oh! ah! I beg your pardon, sir!—pray be seated. Dinah, (to a negress in an adjoining room,) a glass of water

here for this gentleman. You must excuse me! I thought, from seeing your box, you were a peddler; and I detest the lazy drones, who go strolling about to cheat honest, industrious citizens."

"Yes, madam, so do I," I replied. "Of all professions on earth, I think that of peddling the most detestable;" and I spoke from my heart. Here Dinah brought the water; and having drank, I rose to go. "Could you direct me to D'Estang Ville?" I inquired.

"D'Estang Ville!" repeated the other, musingly. "I think I have heard the name before. It is not in this vicinity, I think."

"I believe not, madam; at least I have heard it is near the river Brazos."

"Well, no, I could not direct you to it; but if you take the road to your left, a mile or two beyond here, you will be right for the Brazos."

"Thank you, madam; I wish you good-day;" and I decamped, feeling something like an escaped convict.

Having got out of sight of the house, I sat down by the road side, to wait for Harley. In about ten minutes he made his appearance.

"Well, Harry," he said, "what success? Ah! I read failure in your countenance."

I gave him the particulars of my first attempt; and after a hearty laugh, he rejoined, gravely:

"I was afraid of this, Harry. You must try again, and—"

"No, I thank you," I interrupted; "I am satisfied I was never intended for a peddler. Fortunately, I am not obliged to adopt the profession; and as to the wager, why, I will consider myself the loser."

"Nay, Harry, this will not answer my purpose. You must try your hand at this business, till you can pass for a

salesman—otherwise you will be ignorant of what you profess; and this may accidentally be discovered, at a time when discovery will be fatal to my project."

"I shall never succeed, I assure you, if all my customers are like yonder shrew."

"You will hardly find two alike, Harry; though from what I understand of this shrew, as you term her, I doubt not she is the one to trade liberally, if you only touch her right. Mankind is a great organ, on which, in order to play any tune, you have only to be master of the keys and stops. Come, I will go back and trade with this woman, just to convince you of the truth of what I say."

"Better not try her, Harley; she will set her dogs on you."

"No fear of that—shrews do their own dogging," said Harley, laughing. "Stay you here till I return. I will not be long away."

"No longer than to go and come," rejoined I.

But my friend did not return so soon as I expected: in fact, it was a full half-hour ere I saw him again.

"Well," said I, "were you turned out of the house?"

"No," he answered, "I was politely bowed out, with four dollars and sixty-two cents more in my pocket than when I entered. Ah! my dear fellow, nothing like touching them right."

"And did the old woman really want to trade, after all?"

"Why, she said not; but I knew better; and I stayed till I sold her the amount named."

"Well, I have only to say, then, that if you can make *all* the world believe the moon is made of green cheese, I can make somebody. I will try again."

I did try, and succeeded beyond my expectations; and

each new trial gave me fresh assurance; till at last Harley said he thought me properly trained for his purpose.

It was now considerably past noon; and as neither of us had eaten since morning, we resolved to push forward to a small village, some two miles distant, and there put up for the night.

On our way thither, we came to a fine-looking dwelling, from which issued the sweetest, most melodious music I had ever heard. It appeared to be a female voice, accompanied by a guitar.

"Beautiful!" whispered Harley, as breathlessly we listened to the rich, clear, full notes. "Divine!"

I cannot tell why; but an irresistible desire possessed me to see the singer; and grasping my box, as the last soft tones seemed to melt away into "thin air," I resolutely said to myself—

"I will, and here is my letter of introduction."

"Where are you going, Harry?" inquired my companion, as I turned my steps toward the mansion, which stood half-embowered in a beautiful enclosure, that might not inappropriately be likened to ancient Eden.

"Going to make love," I replied.

"Better do it on a full stomach," he rejoined, with something more in the way of remonstrance, to which I paid no attention.

I entered the enclosure, and passing through an orange grove, along a walk fragrant with the rarest and most delightful flowers of a southern clime, approached the mansion. One idea now filled my soul. Should I see the unknown songstress? and should I find her person as beautiful as I knew her voice to be melodious? Tell me not there is no such thing as animal magnetism—a something which draws together souls, and unites them, like loadstone and steel. I know better—I know it from experience. Else

why went I to seek out the fair warbler, without reflecting on the consequences? Had I been guided by reason, or by judgment, I should not have gone; but I acted from an impulse stronger than reason or judgment; and if this impulse was not in itself magnetism, I know not what it was, and willingly leave the subject, with the fact, for the further investigation of the curious.

I reached the vine-covered portico of the mansion, in a very peculiar frame of mind, and rang the bell. A negro woman answered my summons, and invited me to enter. I did so; and was shown into a very elegant parlor, where I seated myself on a rich sofa, with the air of a lord.

"Is your mistress at home?" I now inquired.

"No, massa—she gwine down to Ga'veston.

"Ah! then it was not her I heard sing?"

"Oh, bless ye, no, massa—missus neber sing—dat was young Missee Clara, I guess you hearn."

"And pray who is Miss Clara?"

"At your service," said a rich, silvery voice; and a beautiful young lady, robed in white, glided gracefully into the room, and advanced toward me.

I rose, bowed, and then recollecting I could offer no excuse for being there but my jewelry, I suddenly grew confused and abashed, and would have given half I was worth to have been anywhere else just at that moment. But my confusion ended in rapturous astonishment, when the lovely being before me suddenly bounded forward, threw her arms around my neck, and embraced me in the most affectionate manner. I returned her embrace—for the temptation was too strong to resist; but for the life of me, I could not tell whether I was being hugged for myself, or for somebody else: at all events, I thought there would be no harm in improving the time—and, as I have said, I did so.

CHAPTER IX.

IN LOVE.

The first words of my fair hostess increased my perplexity and amazement.

"So, truant, I have you at last!" she exclaimed, with animation, stepping back a pace, resting a hand on each shoulder, and letting her soft, bright eyes look full into mine. I was bewildered.

"Good heavens!" cried I,—"do you know me?"

"To be sure I do: did you think two years would efface your image from my remembrance? Ah! I would have known you had we met accidentally in a strange city; how much more then here, when I knew you were coming. You look well," she continued, while I stood dumb with astonishment; "better than I ever saw you before; travel has improved you; you are right handsome."

Here she turned her head aside, and I could perceive a nervous twitching of the muscles around her mouth, as if she were trying to repress the exhibition of some deep emotion. But in vain her effort; and the next moment she lay heavily against my breast, and her tears flowed freely.

"Chide me not!" she murmured; "chide me not! I promised not to weep; but I cannot help it; I am so glad to see you."

"This must be some mistake," I now ventured to say, hardly knowing whether to regard what I saw and felt as

real, or as some vision of the brain—a dream from which all too soon I must wake.

"How a mistake?" she inquired, looking up.

"Why, who do you take me for, fair lady?"

"Come, come—no more of your jokes—at least not now. You cannot play upon me. I tell you I know you. I recognized your voice, when you so innocently inquired who is Miss Clara; but I thought I would be sure, ere I made any demonstrations of joy. But where is aunt? and how is it you come alone? Ah! some mischievous plot of yours, I'll be bound."

"Miss Clara," replied I—"since such I understand is your name—this appears to be a very singular mistake, which, on your account, I regret exceedingly. You are expecting some one, between whom and myself there must be a very extraordinary resemblance; but I do assure you, most sincerely, I am not the person you take me for; and that never, till within this hour, had I the pleasure of looking upon your countenance."

"Ah, brother," she said, pouting her rosy lips, "why will you persist in teasing me in this way? Come! I shall get angry, if you do not instantly acknowledge that you are Walter Moreland, my own dear brother, and then give me such a kiss as a sister ought to have."

"Moreland!" repeated I: "Moreland! surely that name is familiar to me—where have I heard it before? Ha! yes—it must be the same!" exclaimed I; and hastily producing my pocket-book, I took from it a memorandum of facts gathered from the letters of the young man who perished the victim of a gambler on the Neptune. "*Thomas Moreland, of Centreville, Texas,—Son of a Widow Moreland,*" I read. "May I ask, Miss Clara, if you know the individuals mentioned? and if they are connected with your family?"

"Brother, why will you tease me so?" cried my fair companion, with a vexed expression. "You know Thomas is our cousin."

"Miss Moreland," said I, gravely, taking her hand, "I see you still persist in calling me brother; but you must be undeceived, as you soon will be. I solemnly give you my word of honor, as a gentleman, that I am not your brother—that my name is not Walter Moreland—and that, till yesterday, I never set foot on the soil of Texas."

Miss Moreland looked at me incredulously, for a moment or two, and then, starting back, alarmed, exclaimed:

"If not Walter Moreland, my brother, then who on earth are you?"

"My name is Henry Walton, and I am from Virginia."

"Oh! what have I said and done?" she cried, hiding her blushing face. "Stay! one test!" and suddenly springing to me, she lifted the hair from my right temple. "Ah! no," she said; "I am wrong; the scar is not here. Oh! sir, ten thousand pardons! I am overwhelmed with confusion. Hetty, (to the servant, who had all this time been a silent spectator,) did you not think this gentleman my brother?"

"Didn't know, Missee Clara; rader tink so when I seed you kiss him."

"Go and attend to your duties, Hetty!" said Miss Moreland, sternly, fresh color mounting to her temples, till her face glowed like a coal of fire. Then, turning to me again: "Ah, sir, I shall never forgive myself for making such a ridiculous mistake."

I felt I could forgive her a hundred such; and so no doubt would you, reader, of the sterner sex, had you been in my place. Had she been old and ugly, the case might have been different; but it seems a very easy matter to

forgive a young and beautiful woman, when her only crime is that of being a little too affectionate.

And here let me pause to say that Clara Moreland was both young and beautiful. Her age was about eighteen, and her form well developed and symmetrical. Every motion combined grace and dignity, with a sort of winning, affectionate ease, if I may be permitted such a term, which made her very charming. Her complexion was light, and her skin soft and clear. She had sunny hair, and mild, liquid blue eyes, which beamed upon you, through their long lashes, a soul of intellect and tenderness. Her face was full, almost round, with a kind of radiant expression, which even in repose gave her an animated appearance. Her lips were full, and slightly pouting, and just sufficiently open to display a row of pearly teeth. A warm tint, of rosy health, rested on her cheeks; and her color came and went in keeping with her feelings—presenting, not unfrequently in the same moment, the varying shades of an Aurora Borealis. Nothing could exceed in beauty the plumpness of her arms—which were now bare to the elbow—and the lady-like taper of her hand and fingers. Her smile was the most bewitching I had ever seen, and her laugh the most musical I had ever heard. In short, she surpassed the ideal picture I had formed from hearing her sing; and as I intend to be candid with you, reader, I must frankly confess, that from the first I felt myself most desperately in love with her.

In reply to what she had said in the way of apology, I stammered out something about being too happy in knowing that I resembled one so dear to her; and was going on in this strain—which would have brought me up, I know not where—when it suddenly occurred to me, that I was taking unwarrantable liberties with a mistake; and I in

turn became confused and embarrassed, and finally ended with:

"I crave pardon, Miss Moreland! I know not what I am saying."

A dead silence ensued, and we both stood blushing and abashed. I would have given no small sum, to have extricated myself in a polite and dignified manner; but if my life had depended on it, I would not have ventured another sentence, for fear of making a fool of myself. Oh, the humiliating agony of that moment! I shall never forget it. I have been in some very perilous and trying situations since; I have seen death staring me in the face in various forms; but candidly, I confess, I do not know that I ever felt *more*, in the same space of time, in my life. You may laugh, reader—you that have never been similarly tried; but I appeal to all of experience in such matters, to say if they doubt the truth of my assertion. Talk about bayonets and batteries! I have since faced both, like a man, when the battle was raging, and death was doing its work on every side; but it was nothing to standing before the battery of the lovely Clara Moreland's eyes. I could think, reason, speak and act on the battle-field; here I could do neither; all my intellectual faculties seemed jumbled into chaos; and poor I standing there, a kind of "wreck of matter."

Woman, by a peculiar gift, is generally the first, at such times, to recover herself; and it was so in the present instance: for Clara, accidentally resting her eyes on my box, said, timidly:

"I believe you called to—"

"Oh, yes," I interrupted, speaking the first clear idea that entered my head, and which I gathered from following her eyes to the box: "Yes, I called to sell you some

jewelry; have some very fine, I assure you;" and I made a motion toward the box, when her language arrested me.

"Jewelry?" she repeated, with a look of surprise. "Oh, then you are a peddler?" and I fancied she drew herself up a little proudly. "I was about to observe, I thought you called to learn something concerning my cousin, Thomas Moreland, as you mentioned the name."

Reader, did you ever, in a dream, fancy yourself in a glorious region of beatitude? and then, by a blunder of the foot, feel yourself pitched headlong down, far down, into a quagmire? If you ever did, you no doubt felt somewhat "fallen from your high estate;" but even then, your feelings were bliss compared to mine, when I fully comprehended what a mercenary blockhead I had made of myself. If what I had previously experienced may be termed the torture of bashfulness—what I now underwent must be denominated the quaintessence of meanness.

What! seek to sell jewelry to the divinity before me? I, of the best blood of old Virginia—a descendant of the Cavaliers—the son of a wealthy planter—a gentleman of independent fortune? I, Harry Walton, to seek to dispose of my gew-gaws, for a profit, to the only being I had ever seen that I loved? Oh, I could have cut my tongue out for uttering the words; I would have torn myself with red-hot pincers, to have had them unsaid; and as for the box of vile trinkets, if my wishes on that had been granted, it would long since have been in a place where I hope I shall never be. It has been said of the lamented Davy Crocket, that when he wanted to crawl through a hole one-half the size of his body, he thought of the meanest thing he ever did, and went through easily; and on the same principle, I believe, just then, I could have crawled through a gimlet hole. "Well," thought I, with an old motto, "'desperate diseases require desperate remedies;' and something must

be done now, Harry, to regain your footing, or you will never be able to hold your head up again." For the time it would take one to count ten, I thought intensely, desperately, agonizingly; and then I had settled on my course.

"Miss Moreland," I began, with a courtly ease that, three minutes before, I would almost have sacrificed my right hand to possess: "Miss Moreland, in judging by appearances, we often judge wrongly. I am not what I seem. I am not a peddler. True, this is a box of jewelry; and on the road hither I have stopped at several dwellings, and effected several sales. But in doing so I had a purpose, which at present I cannot explain to you. And now, pardon me for speaking candidly, and saying why I am here. I was passing this house with a friend, when we were both arrested by hearing sounds of melody that I fancied could proceed from no ordinary being. To behold that being I felt an irresistible desire; and without thinking further, than that I could make my adopted vocation an excuse for my intrusion, I made bold to enter here, and you know what has followed."

My fair companion again blushed, and seemed more embarrassed than ever; but finally stammered out:

"This—this is quite singular—very strange!"

"It is strange, Miss Moreland; for everything appears strange to us, that we cannot give a reason for; but what seems most singular of all, is, that in me you should behold such a likeness to your brother, and that in you I should find so near a relative of one who, a stranger to me. I chanced to see die, and consigned to a stranger's grave, in a strange land. It seems more than accident, Miss Moreland; and I am fain to believe that Providence has brought us together."

"I do not understand you, sir," she said, turning pale.

"Thomas Moreland, your cousin, is no more."

"Dead?" she almost shrieked.

"Alas! that I must say yes."

"How? where? when? Oh! this is terrible news! You are not deceiving me, sir?"

"He that could trifle with your feelings on such a subject, Miss Moreland," I replied, gravely, "is a vile wretch—and I trust you do not think me such."

"Oh, no, sir—no—forgive me! I knew not what I said—this news came so sudden. Oh, tell me how it happened!"

"Calm yourself, Miss Moreland," I said; and I proceeded to give her all the particulars I knew concerning the gambler's victim—how he died and where he was buried—the which, being known to the reader, I need not here repeat.

She burst into tears, and wept like a child.

"Poor Thomas!" she exclaimed; "what a terrible fate! Alas! alas! his poor mother! this blow, I fear, will kill her—for he was all her hope;" and she wept anew.

I did not offer anything in the way of consolation—for well I knew there is no solace for grief equal to tears. At last, becoming somewhat tranquilized, she proceeded to answer my inquiry concerning the unfortunate young man, by giving me a brief history of his family, which was in substance as follows:

Frederick Moreland, the father of Thomas, had removed to Texas, from Kentucky, during the early struggles of the late Republic for independence. He had a wife and four children, the youngest of whom, Thomas, was then an infant. He had purchased a tract of land near the Brazos, and been settled upon it only about six months, when a gang of Mexicans came to his house one night, killed him and three children, plundered the dwelling, and

set it on fire. Just previous to the attack, Mrs. Moreland, with her youngest born in her arms, had stepped out; and hearing the murderous assault, she concealed herself in a thicket, and so escaped the massacre. This terrible blow had nearly proved fatal to her; but she had survived it, to concentrate all her thoughts, affections, hopes, and fears, upon the only remaining child. He grew up a wayward youth, was over-indulged, and had squandered her fortune in drinking and gambling. For the last two years, however, he had been a reformed man; but, alas! his early dissipation had planted the seeds of a disease that bade fair to make him its victim. His mother, with whom he lived, could not bear the thought that he should die so young, and advised him to travel; and, to give him the means, was about to sell the little all she possessed, when it was accidentally discovered, that Frederick Moreland, the husband and father, had a claim on the United States Government for services rendered, as surveyor on the Red River, previous to his removal to Texas. This claim, with interest, amounted to between one and two thousand dollars; and Thomas, to see the country and improve his health, had gone to Washington, to petition Congress to settle it. Since then, Clara had heard nothing of him, till I informed her of his death. We were now led to believe, from what I had heard him utter, that he had succeeded in getting the money, and was on his return, when the desire of gaming getting the better of his resolution, he had yielded to the temptation, and so shortened his days. What an awful destiny was his! and oh! how terribly must the intelligence of his doom fall upon the ear of his poor mother! I shuddered at the thought.

My narration of the death and burial of Miss Moreland's cousin—her brief story of his history, and the causes that led to his untimely end—together with the

uniting of our sympathies on the same objects, living and dead—established at once a feeling of intimacy between her and myself, that months might not have effected, had we met under other circumstances; and as for myself, I could hardly realize that we had known each other less than two hours—or rather, perhaps, correctly speaking, that we hardly knew each other yet.

In further conversation she spoke freely of her own history—said she resided in Houston—that her father was one of the early pioneers of the country—was a personal friend of General Houston—had fought under him for the independence of Texas—had risen to the rank of Colonel—was a member of the Texan Congress, and had been a strenuous advocate for annexation. She had one brother older, and one sister younger than herself, and a mother—all now living. Her brother—who bore a remarkable resemblance to myself, and who, as nigh as I could judge, was quite an original in his way—had been absent two years in Europe, and was now on his return. A letter had been received from him, dated at New Orleans, in which he stated he expected to reach Galveston by a certain steamer, which was now due. She, Clara, had come down to stay a day or two with her aunt—her mother's sister—who, with her children, three in number, had gone to meet her brother at the boat. As there was not convenient room in the carriage for more, she had preferred awaiting his arrival here.

Thus conversing, happy beyond wish of change, I "took no note of time," till I chanced to hear a clock strike the fifth hour from noon. This suddenly brought to recollection where I was, and in what manner I had left my friend. I sprang to my feet.

"You are not going?" said Miss Moreland, in a tone of bewitching sweetness.

"I must—I must!—heavens! how the time has flown! I cannot realize we have been three hours together."

"To me it seems as if we had been much, very much, longer acquainted," replied my fair companion, with the utmost *naivete.* "But perhaps," she added, quickly, blushing at the thought of the construction I might put upon her words—"perhaps it is because of your striking likeness to my brother. But surely, Mr. Walton, you can stop to tea? My aunt would be delighted to see you; and my brother also, if he comes."

"And no one *could* be more delighted at my accepting your kind invitation, than your humble servant, Miss Moreland," I replied; "and accept it I would, I assure you, had I only myself to consult. But there are others in the case. I have a friend awaiting me, and must therefore decline. But, Miss Moreland—" here I ventured to take her hand, which trembled, as did my voice, while her respiration changed, the color deepened on her beautiful features, and her soft bewitching eyes sought the ground, and their long lashes drooped over them: "Miss Moreland—" here I really began to grow embarrassed, with excess of emotion, and my brain to grow clouded: "Miss Moreland—I—that is—will you—may I hope—this is not —our last—meeting—and that I—"

"Dar's a nigger out here, says as how his name's Tom, and wants to know ef his Massa Walloon's in dis house!" cried Hetty, at this moment bursting into the room.

Reader, you must fancy what followed—or if you cannot, you may console yourself with the reflection, that you know just as much about it as I do. I have an indistinct recollection, however, of seeing something white disappear, and something black take its place; and Tom has since assured me, in a sorrowful way, that the black was himself, and that on that memorable occasion he was nearly

shaken to death. I am rather inclined to think he had some foundation for his assertion—from the fact, that the first thing I do distinctly remember, I was standing in the middle of the road, and had the collar of his coat closely compressed between two thumbs and several nervous digits.

CHAPTER X.

THE BY-ROAD.

On quitting my hold of Tom, which I did the moment I had fairly regained my senses, I demanded to know what had become of Harley, who was nowhere to be seen.

"He gone, Massa Hal—two, four, seven, ten hours ago," replied Tom, who had no very extended knowledge of numerals.

"Gone?" echoed I.

"Yes, Massa Hal: he wait 'bout short time, and den he tell me to tole you you find him at de tabern. I wait, and wait, and wait—till, golly! I tink mebby you gone to —and den I go and 'quire; bu-bu-but—"

Here Tom stopped, rubbed his head, looked significantly at me, and concluded to let the sentence end thus.

"Well, boy, never mind," I said: "I abused you without cause, I know, and you shall be paid for it. Come! take up the box, and let us hasten forward—there is no telling in what mood we shall find Harley."

In less than half an hour, I stood upon the piazza of the only inn of a small but pleasant village.

"Is it possible you have arrived, Harry?" exclaimed Harley, coming out to meet me. "Well, this is indeed surprising! Why, I thought you had married your unknown nightingale, and had flown away, to have a honeymoon of air and melody. How's your stomach? By-the-bye, some fine cold fricasseed chicken, ham, venison-steak, and apple-dumplings in here—would have been hot, had

you come in time. I thought I might as well order several dishes, seeing you are to defray the expenses. No fine old port here, or champaigne; but never mind—we may find something better yet. Well, how did you get on, any how? But, joking aside, I have learned something important. No one here knows anything of D'Estang Ville; but a stranger, who overheard me making inquiry about the carriage, politely informed me that he saw such an one stop at a road-side inn, some five miles from here; and that two gentlemen, and a very beautiful lady, alighted from it. I doubt not they were those we seek; and as soon as you have eaten, Harry, I am for pushing on, and learning more about them to-night. Come! what do you say?"

"I am somewhat fatigued, Morton, with this day's work; but I understand your anxiety, and will go."

"Hasten, then, with your dinner—for I wish to get there before night. The inn is on a by-road; and though I have inquired out the way thither, so that I think I shall have no difficulty in finding it, yet I would rather do so by daylight. And now," he added, "it suddenly strikes me, as something singular, that they should take a by-road, and stop at so obscure a place. Eh! Harry—what do you think of it?"

"I cannot say that I altogether like it," I replied; "though the by-road you speak of may be the nearest way to D'Estang Ville; and their simply stopping at the inn proves nothing sinister."

"Well, we shall see," was Harley's reply.

While engaged with my meal, I gave him an account of my remarkable adventure in the way of love and romance; and laughing heartily at the ludicrous opening, and still more ludicrous finale, he said:

"Why, Harry, you begin about as romantically as I did; but you end—"

"The end is not yet, my dear fellow," I interrupted.

"Well, success to your *affaire de cœur*, since I see it has assumed that importance, and may it never cost you the misery mine has me. By Jove! Harry, fate and love seem to be at work for you as well as me. How singular that, in the musical unknown, you should find the cousin of the poor fellow we saw die on the Neptune! and how little you thought then, that the unselfish interest you took in his welfare, would eventually lead to the happiest, as well as most important, result of your life!"

"Stop, my dear fellow; you are going into futurity a little too fast; it has led to nothing as yet, but a few hours of very agreeable conversation—and—we may never meet again."

Harley burst into a hearty laugh; and then with a deep sigh, a grave face, and doleful shake of the head, repeated my words:

"And—we may never meet again. Poor fellow! I see it is all over with you. Cupid has done his work. Well, you must assist me in my project now—and then if I can do you a good turn, rest assured I will."

From the little village where we were now stopping, which for various reasons I shall not name, we took the road leading almost due west; and having pursued this a couple of miles or so, we came to a rather obscure by-road, which branched off to the left, into a deep, dark forest.

"This is our way," said Harley, pointing to it.

"You must be mistaken, I think," I replied: "that is not a carriage road—it is only a road for mules and horses."

"I am right, nevertheless," rejoined my friend, "for I made particular inquiry. And see!" he added, pointing

to the ground; "a carriage has passed along here, for here are the marks of wheels."

"Well, then, if you are sure you're right, let us push ahead; but truth compels me to say, I am not pleased with the route."

"Nor I," said Harley, looking troubled. "Why should they take Viola over such a lonely way as this? Harry, I repeat, I do not like it; to me there seems something dark and mysterious about it; I fear all is not as it should be."

"Of that you may be certain," I replied; "else they would not, in the first place, have taken Viola away against her will."

"Right, Harry—right; they may prove villains enough for anything. Heavens! I grow uneasy at the thought! Not till now have I looked upon the affair in this startling light. Oh, by my hopes hereafter! if they do wrong her, they shall pay dearly for it. Ha! what a cut-throat looking place!" continued Harley, as we advanced deeper and deeper into the woods. "Let us stop and examine our weapons, Harry;" and as each drew forth a pair of Colt's revolvers, and saw that everything was right, he added: "Well, after all, we have no great deal to fear, while we have such powerful friends as these to stand by us. And there are three of us," he continued, nodding to Tom, who stood respectfully back, with a box under each arm. "I suppose we can depend on him—eh! Harry?"

"To the death," replied I: "a braver fellow never lived."

"Well, he must have one of these instruments of death. Can you shoot, Tom?"

"Never tried um, massa," answered the black.

"Come here;" and Harley explained to him how to use the revolver—which, as most of my readers know, simply

consists, when charged, in pulling the trigger. "Well, Tom, what do you think now?"

"Spec' I could do dat, massa," grinned Tom.

"Well, take it, conceal it about your person, and mind, boy, you do not lay a hand on it again till we bid you, or you find it absolutely necessary to send a ball through some villain's head! Do you hear?"

"Yes, massa—I do just as you tell um;" and Tom transferred the revolver to a side-pocket, with a feeling of pride at the confidence reposed in him, which I had seldom seen expressed in his honest countenance.

About a mile further on, we came to a creek, or small stream, which crossed the narrow road we were travelling. There being no bridge, we were obliged to ford it; which we did, without other inconvenience than wetting our feet—it being about knee deep in the most shallow part. Thus far the ground had been nearly level, but very heavily wooded; and since turning into this by-path—for it hardly deserved the name of road—we had seen no trace of a habitation. Every thing looked sombre and gloomy; and to add to the dreariness of our journey, the day was nearly spent, and we knew that night must soon overtake us. The marks of wheels were here visible, and had been all the way hither; but what was somewhat singular—or perhaps I should say suspicious—was the fact, that we could no where discover the trace of more than one carriage having passed over this route—thus showing, conclusively, it was not frequented by conveyances of this description. From the creek, as small streams are usually termed here, we ascended a slight eminence, and beheld, with any thing but pleasant feelings, the path we were pursuing descend into a swampy looking wood, between two walls of dense undergrowth, whose spreading branches, meeting overhead, almost shut out daylight, and made our way appear dismal enough.

On perceiving this, Harley looked more troubled and anxious; but compressing his lips, and knitting his brows, as one whose mind is made up for the worst, he merely said:

"Come, Harry, let us quicken our pace."

We did so, and pushed forward in silence—each experiencing that intense, gloomy depression of spirits, which inclines one to commune with himself rather than with another—when one feels that the human voice, even his own, must prove discordant with his feelings.

We kept on perhaps a mile further—our road changing not for the better, and still without sign of habitation—when the sun went down, and the shadows of approaching night fell upon our lonesome way, making it impossible to distinguish objects at more than a couple of rods from the eye. As if to increase the disagreeableness of our journey, we now occasionally heard the hideous howl of some hungry wolf, the hooting of neighboring owls, the chirping and humming of night insects, and the whirring, flapping sound of bats, which began to cross our path in numbers, before and behind, whirling round us, sometimes almost brushing our faces, as if indignant that human foot should intrude upon a territory that nature had marked as their own. Night, too, came down upon us so fast, that in five minutes more we found it impossible to keep the path, only by fixing our eyes upon the narrow streak of light that was dimly visible through the meeting branches overhead.

"Well," spoke Harley, at length, gloomily, "this is more than I bargained for. Were it not that—"

"Hello!" said a gruff voice, so close to us that both involuntarily started, and laid our hands on our revolvers.

"Who are you?" demanded Harley, sharply and quickly.

"Wall, stranger, first, who ar' you?" returned the voice,

in that broad, strong accent peculiar to the backwoodsmen of the West and South; and we now became aware, rather by sound than sight, that the speaker was directly in front of us.

"We are travellers," I hastened to answer.

"Ha! another voice," said the unknown; "how many are ye?"

"By what right do you question, sir?" I demanded, beginning to grow indignant.

"Wall, no partikler right," answered the other—"only I'm a traveller too, and this arn't the safest place in the world to run agin strangers."

"You have nothing to fear from us, if you are peaceably disposed," said Harley.

"Oh, as to that matter, reckon thar arn't much skeer 'bout me," replied the voice, in a careless, off-hand tone. "I'm for peace or fight, just which happens to be trumps."

"Well, do you know the country round here?" inquired Harley.

"Hev seed some on't in my time, expect," was the answer.

"Is there a tavern on ahead?"

"Two on 'em ef you like."

"How far is it to the first?"

"You mean the best?"

"No, the nearest."

"Wall, a good mile'n a half 'll fetch you thar."

"Is it a respectable house?"

"Better ax old Mike Browes, the lan'ord, that thar question—he'll tell ye, stranger,—ha, ha, ha! But, jokin' aside, it's a rum place for them as has the rhino. 'Spect you've got the tin, eh?"

"None to boast of, though perhaps enough to pay for a

night's lodging," replied Harley. "But is the road from here there all the way like this?"

"Why, some'at so—leastways till you strike a cl'aring, a piece this side."

"Then there is a clearing in this part of the world?" rejoined Harley, ironically.

"Al'ays, stranger, when you come to em," was the ready and characteristic reply.

"Thank you—we will now set forward: good evening, sir."

"Good-night," replied the stranger; and still keeping his place in the centre of the road, he managed to touch each of us, as if by accident, as we passed by him; and then we heard him mutter to himself, but could not distinguish what he said.

"I do not like it," said Harley to me, in a low tone, when we had got beyond earshot of the stranger. "There is something wrong here, depend upon it; but we are in for it now, and must take our chance. Keep close, Tom, and let us all be wary."

"What do you apprehend?" inquired I.

"I do not know; we are in a part of the world where all sorts of crime abound, and should be on our guard for the worst."

Our progress through the wood was now necessarily slow, by reason of the darkness; but in less than half-an-hour we reached the opening, with no other incident worth recording, than the howl of one or two wolves a little nearer than was agreeable. On gaining the clearing, we could see our way much better; and soon after we found ourselves in front of a large, rough-looking, two-story building, which proved to be the inn of which we were in search.

There was a light in the lower room, and we heard the sound of many voices.

"Is it not singular, Harry," said Harley, after listening a short time, "that there should be so many persons assembled in this out-of-the-way place?"

"What do you infer from it?" I inquired.

"Why, to tell you the truth, I am apprehensive it is a haunt of robbers."

"I must admit I am much of the same opinion—at least things look suspicious."

"Well, we can judge better after having seen the interior. Let us keep together, and be civil, and we may meet with no difficulty; but should they attempt to molest us, we know who are our true friends;" and Harley tapped the butt of a revolver. "I shall assume my French character while here; and if you have occasion to address me by name, remember it is Jacques. Tom, you will keep ever with us; and mind you do not allow yourself to get separated. And, Harry, make no inquiry about the carriage or its occupants—leave all that to me."

Saying this, Harley boldly advanced to the door, opened it, and entered—I keeping close to his heels, and Tom bringing up the rear with the boxes.

CHAPTER XI.

MORE MYSTERY.

We now found ourselves in a large room, poorly lighted, poorly furnished, and strong with the fumes of tobacco. In one corner was a pantry-like bar, with a few shelves along the wall, garnished with bottles and tumblers, and a wooden grating in front, a portion of which belonged to the door opening into it. There were three or four small tables standing along the wall farthest from the door; and at two of these, on stools and benches, sat some half-a-dozen rough-looking fellows, playing cards by the light of two tallow candles. They all looked up on our entrance, and stared at us a moment or two; and then, as the majority resumed their games, one of their number arose, and handing his cards to his nearest companion, said:

"Here, Bill, take my hand;" and he added something in a whisper. He then advanced to us, and continued: "Good evening, gents; travellers, I reckon?"

"Yes," I answered—"peddlers, who wish to get a night's lodging."

"Well, I can 'commodate you, expect," replied the landlord, for such the speaker was, as he took a rather close survey of our persons. "Want supper, 'spose?"

"No, we dined rather late, and having none too much money, must try and get along without the expense of another meal," I replied.

Again the host—who was a stout, heavily built man, of about forty, with black hair and beard, large bushy eye

brows, that met at the line of the nose, and a countenance otherwise strongly marked—examined us with an air of some curiosity, and then rejoined, pointing to Tom:

"This nigger—is he a peddler, too?"

"No, he merely carries our boxes."

"Wall, must say you travel raythor stiff, to be so short of the rhino."

"If we pay for all we call for, I suppose that is nobody's business but our own," I replied, a little sharply, beginning to grow indignant at what I considered a species of insolence.

"Oh, certainly," replied the host, with a confused laugh: "meant no harm, stranger. You're right—nobody's business. Come, sit down;" and he pointed to some vacant benches near. "Shall I take care of your boxes for you?"

"No, thank you—will not put you to that trouble—Tom can do that, for that is all he has to do," I replied, carelessly.

"Wall, please yourselves, gents. If you don't want anything, why I'll just finish my hand. By-the-by, would you like a game to yourselves?—plenty of cards."

"No, I never play," I replied.

"Sometime, monsieur, I was play in Nouvelle Orlean," now spoke Harley for the first time; "and I lose six, ten, seven dollare; and, by gar! I play no not agin, nevare."

"A cheap bought experience, my French friend," said the host, with a laugh; and he returned to the table and resumed his game.

The company seemed in good spirits—for they laughed, cracked rough jokes, swore some, drank, smoked, and continued playing, paying no attention to us beyond a glance now and then, such as frequenters of bar-rooms of a like character to this usually bestow upon strangers.

We sat and watched them for about an hour, when I signified to the landlord that we would retire for the night.

"Sleep together?" he inquired.

"Yes; and if you have something to throw on the floor, Tom will occupy the same apartment."

The host called a drowsy-looking negro, handed him a light, gave him some private instructions, and bade us follow him. We quitted the room by a flight of stairs at the end opposite the players; and as I looked back, I saw the whole company, the host not excepted, busy with their cards. No one seemed to think it worth his while to look after us; and this, I must confess, lessened my uneasiness, and lightened my suspicions. Still, I by no means felt satisfied that all was right. I did not altogether like the looks of the persons here assembled; and I could not divest myself of the idea, that they had a motive in meeting here, so many of them, beyond the mere excitement of playing cards. Had there been dwellings along the road in the immediate vicinity, I should have thought less of it; but unless they lived here, which was not probable, they must have come from a distance.

Thus I reflected, as we followed our black guide up the stairs. We entered a large apartment, which ran along the front of the house, over the bar-room, and whose only furniture consisted of half-a-dozen squalid-looking beds, and two or three benches. From this we passed into another room of small dimensions, which contained a decent looking bed, a small mirror, a wash-stand, a tin basin, a towel, and a couple of old, rickety chairs. The black put down the light, and going into the other room, returned with a dirty-looking mattress, which he threw on the floor for Tom. He then inquired if we wished for anything more; and being answered in the negative, he groped his way down stairs, leaving us to ourselves. We

closed the door, and saw that its only fastening was an iron latch.

"Well, Harry, what do you think of it?" inquired my friend in a whisper.

"I cannot say I am very well pleased—but I think they meditate no harm to us."

"I agree with you, Harry—but also think it best to be on our guard. We must not all sleep at the same time, and this door must be fastened by placing the bed against it. And now let us examine the room carefully."

We did so—ceiling, walls, and floor—no part, not even a crack, escaping a keen scrutiny. But save that the window was not large enough to allow a person to jump out—and that the partition, in which the door was hung, did not quite reach to the ceiling above—we discovered nothing calculated to increase our uneasiness or suspicion. I now opened the door, and setting the candle behind it, peered into the larger apartment. There were two windows in front, next to the road, and one of these was just sufficiently open to admit the gentle play of a cool, pleasant night-breeze. I took off my boots, advanced to it softly, and looked out. It was dark, very dark; but I could see a few of the brighter stars through a hazy atmosphere; and all around appeared quiet, as if nature were taking a calm repose—not even the howl of a wolf, or the hoot of an owl, broke the stillness—nothing, in fact, but the voices and occasional laughter of the persons below. Chancing to cast my eyes to the ceiling, I perceived a spot of light thereon, about the size of a dollar. I naturally looked down to find its source, and saw it came through a knot-hole in the floor. With great care, lest my feet should be heard, I approached this, and placing my eye to it, had a full view of the party underneath. They were still intent on their games as when I left them; and after watching

them a few minutes, I returned to my room, and reported to Harley what I had seen.

"Well," he replied, in a whisper, "this confirms me in my belief, that we have nothing to fear; but a little extra caution can do us no harm. Come, let us place the bed and turn in."

We were on the point of doing so, when we heard a clattering sound, as of a horse coming at full speed. We listened. It drew nearer and nearer, and in less than three minutes seemed to halt at the door. I hastened to the window, and was just in time to see a figure spring from its back, and advance quickly toward the house. I hurried to the aperture in the floor, and though I could not see him enter, I saw him a moment after, approaching the tables where the players sat. His step was quick and elastic, and his bearing lordly. He wore a kind of blue uniform, and had a black mask on his face. His person was instantly recognized, and I was struck with the deference which all paid him. Each man rose to his feet, threw down his cards, and uttering the single word "Captain," stood in respectful silence till addressed.

"Any strangers here, Mike?" inquired the new-comer of the landlord, in a rapid tone, with a slight foreign accent.

"Two peddlers and a nigger, but they are gone to bed," was the answer.

The new-comer now removed his mask, and I saw that he was a rather good-looking gentleman of five-and-thirty, with a moustache on his lip, fine, sharp, pale features, and eyes black, sparkling, and intense.

"I want another horse, Mike," he continued; "the best blood you have, and a hasty lunch. In ten minutes I must be on the road, for I intend to reach home by sunrise."

"It's a long journey, Cap'en, to be got over in that time; but Black Bess can do her part to Ned Long's; and that's a cool twenty-five miles; and thar you must git another critter to take you through to your Ville. I believe one animal can do it from thar—though it's been so long since I rid it, I most forgit."

"You are right; but you forget something else—the horse and lunch."

"In a twinkling, Cap'en;" and the landlord withdrew in haste, to execute his orders.

"Well, my good fellows," continued the Captain, (as for convenience I will call him,) "what success with the last? good—eh?"

"Yes, Cap'en—yes, your honor," answered all at once.

"No trouble in sliding now, eh?"

"Goes easy, Cap'en."

"What are you doing here?"

"Why," answered one, "we're just on our way out, and thought we'd stop and have a jolly parting cup with old Mike."

"Well, right; you deserve to enjoy yourselves. But (in a lower tone) these peddlers—did you trade?"

"Didn't try, Cap'en—too near home."

"Ah! yes—a good idea—it is as well. They suspect nothing, eh?"

"If I thought they did, I'd—"

"No, no, Bill—none of that; do nothing rash, for so slight a cause; there are always cases enough of necessity. Were they proving troublesome, then—" and the Captain ended by laying his finger on his lips.

Here the landlord returned, and the Captain withdrew with him, first telling the others to resume their games, which they did. About five minutes after, the front door opened, and a negro, thrusting his head in, said:

"Hoss ready for gemman."

Soon after I heard the Captain say:

"Good night, friends, and have a care."

"Good-night, Cap'en! Good-night, your honor! Long life to ye!" were the several replies.

I now heard the door open, and hastened to the window. Harley was already there.

"Ha, ha, ha!" we heard the host laugh: "she's coy, Cap'en, I know—I seen it; and she's got speret too—but she'll tame powerful under your hands."

"I bring a little experience to the trial," laughed the other; "and I have a way of my own in such matters. But remember—not a word to the others."

"Oh, trust *me!* I'm nobody's fool—no!"

"Well, *au revoir!* I ride to beauty's bower," rejoined the other; and mounting a horse held by the negro, he added: "Next time, Mike, I hope to tell you more;" and, with the last word, he touched the fiery beast with his spur, and was instantly lost in the darkness, speeding away like an arrow.

I felt a pressure on my arm; and turning to Harley, I became aware that he was in a fainting condition. Placing an arm around his waist, I raised and bore him to our room, laid him on the bed, and wet his forehead with cold water. In a minute or so he revived, and sat up, supporting himself against my shoulder.

"My dear fellow," I whispered, for I did not care to speak aloud, "what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"I am better now, thank you," he whispered in reply. "I did feel ill for the moment—intense and painful thought seemed to make my brain dizzy. Harry, tell me, candidly, am I a fool, or am I not?"

"Why such a question, my friend?"

"Because I am unaccountably impressed with the idea, that he who just now rode away is Count D'Estang."

"Then if that make you a fool, I am another, for I am of the same opinion, though I can give no good and sufficient reason therefor."

"Ah! I felt it in my soul, as one feels a barb in his flesh. Harry, tell me not that the human mind possesses not that faculty called instinct. We do have it; and it is mightier than reason, and surer than reflection. Tell me what you saw and heard."

I did so.

"That word 'Ville,' strengthens me in my suspicion," he said, as I repeated the language of the host.

"It first excited mine," I replied.

"What does he here? and what means his connection with these men? Oh, that the morrow were come! The plot thickens, Harry; and if it go on thus to the end, we shall make ourselves heroes of a living romance. Oh, Viola! Viola! would I were with thee, to guard thee from peril, or perish in thy defence! Heaven help me! I shall sleep none to-night. Sleep you, Harry: I will watch. Oh, that the morrow were come! I am miserable."

Thus Harley went on for some five or ten minutes, when he grew calmer, and began to tell me over his plans with regard to her he loved. I was fatigued and drowsy; and getting the bedstead moved against the door, I turned in, and was soon fast asleep—the monotonous whispering of my friend being the last sound I heard.

He talked of Viola St. Auburn—I dreamed of Clara Moreland.

CHAPTER XII.

SUSPICIONS AND CERTAINTIES.

In the small hours of the morning, I was awakened by my friend, who said that if I would watch the remainder of the night, he would try and get some rest. I did so. Nothing, however, occurred to alarm us; and a little after day-light we rose, dressed, and went below. As we passed through the larger chamber, I saw that the majority of the beds were occupied—but we passed on, disturbing no one, and without being ourselves disturbed.

In the bar-room we found the landlord, who met us with a cheerful countenance.

"Hope you slept well," he said.

"Like logs," was my answer; and Tom, who was yawning and rubbing his eyes, seemed confirmation of the assertion.

"Raythor poor country for your business," said the host.

"Why, it seems rather thinly peopled along here," I rejoined.

"By-the-bye, what have you got to sell?"

"Jewelry."

"Umph! not much of them trinkets wanted around here: we rough, back-wood's fellows go in for things more useful."

"How far is it to the next tavern?"

"Wall, ef you turn up on to the main road—But which way are you travelling?"

"West."

"Wall, on the main road—which you must have left back here 'bout three or four mile—you'll come to a tavern in about ten mile; but along this, you'll have to travel 'bout twenty-five."

"Any houses on this road?"

"None to speak on—leastways none whar you'll be likely to sell much."

"I was want to find one Monsieur D'Estang," now chimed in Harley. "Somebody was tell me he was leeve in zis contree—but I was coome several mile, and I no see him."

"Ha! do you know him?" queried the host, quickly, with awakened interest, looking at us more keenly.

"I was hear of him," replied Harley, with a significant shrug: "him one countreeman."

"Yes, both French."

"You was know him, eh?"

"I didn't say so—but the name's French."

"Oui, monsieur—one grande nam' Français."

"You want to see him on pertickler business?'

Harley answered by another significant shrug.

"A little in the"—and the landlord made a peculiar sign.

Harley smiled, with another shrug.

"So, aha! why didn't you make this known last night?"

"I mak' not'ing known, monsieur—not I—aha!"

"I see—very shrewd: sell jewelry—capital! Take so' thing?" and the host nodded toward the bar.

"You was be one, eh?" and Harley winked knowingly, and gave another shrug, which in a Frenchman always says so much.

"You shall see;" and the landlord seized the hand of

my friend, squeezed it in a peculiar way, pressing his thumb strongly on one of the knuckles.

"Aha! was convince—oui—varree rejoice I learn you: I was drink you health."

"You should have made yourselves known last night," pursued the host, as he entered the bar, and set a bottle of brandy on the counter. "You mought hev got into trouble."

We drank to each other's future success; and then Harley said:

"But you was not tell me where Monsieur D'Estang?"

"True, thar, gents;" and the communicative host proceeded to put us in possession of the very important fact, with such particulars as left us no doubt about finding our way thither. "Ef I'd only known you last night," he said, in conclusion, "I mought perhaps have saved you a journey."

"How so?" inquired I.

"Why, the Cap'en was here."

"Indeed! *here?*" echoed I, with a look of amazement; "how unfortunate we did not know it!"

"All your own fault; you oughter knowed Mike Browse, anyhow. By-the-by, I forgot to ax who sent you here."

"We was coome accidental," answered Harley, quickly, lest I should get confused — a very timely precaution. "We was just in zis contree from Nouvelle Orlean."

"From New Orleans?" repeated the other, musingly. Then suddenly: "Surely, you are not the—"

"Oui," replied Harley, at a venture, as he paused.

"Give us your hand again," cried the landlord, joyfully. "Glad to see you, as ef I'd trod on a nail. I know'd he'd send some one—but I mistook your business. The Cap'en 'll be glad to see you, too—though he's got a good work-

man since he writ; but that's no matter; al'ays plenty to do in our profession—ha, ha, ha!"

"Where, when, and how, will this mystification end?" thought I. I knew Harley must be as much perplexed as myself—though his air and look was that of one who understood the whole matter perfectly.

Happening to glance at Tom, who stood back, with a box under each arm, the host continued, knowingly, nodding toward the black:

"Have the tools thar, expect?"

"Oui," said Harley; "some jewelry, and de tool."

"Could I just look at them?"

"I was like oblige—but, pardonnez moi! it was with me one grande secrete?"

"Yes, I understand. Well, come in and take breakfast; and as I hear our friends stirring overhead, I'll introduce you to some good fellows."

"Pardonnez moi!" returned Harley: "I was like to mak' acquaint with gentilhomme—but I was not speak to only Capitaine. I was maybe do wrong speak to you, I do assure: you see, eh?"

"Oh, never mind, then—mum—you shall eat private."

During our meal, the landlord continued his mysterious inquiries; but Harley, by a peculiar run of good luck, answered each to his satisfaction; and while my friend and I were puzzling our brains to know what it all meant, the host seemed to pride himself on the valuable discovery he had made. When we came to settle our bill, he refused to take a cent; and on leaving, he whispered in our ears the pass-word, as he called it.

"Well, what *does* all this mean?" said I, when we were once more alone upon the road.

"Really, I felt like asking that question myself," re-

plied Harley. "But it means something—there is no doubt about that."

"These men are banded together for some secret purpose, and at the head of them is Monsieur D'Estang," said I; "so much we know—the only question being as regards the purpose."

"What say you to counterfeiters, Harry?"

'Faith! you might have been more unlikely in your surmise—for supposing them such, I can see a meaning in nearly everything that was said."

"Can you not in quite everything, Harry?"

'Why, the tools—what could he mean by them?"

"Can dies and plates be made without tools?"

"Ha! true: and so he believes us—"

"Perhaps die-sinkers or engravers."

"But not knowing this, how dared you venture to answer his questions in the way you did?"

"Why, I knew I must venture something, after the conversation had opened as you know how; and I thought I might as well risk much as little: the result proved me right: besides, I was anxious to draw him on, in order to get some special information concerning D'Estang. So then I was not wrong in my surmise! and it was he, the scoundrel, that was here last night, boasting of his power over his prisoner, who of course is none other than Viola! Oh, it is well I no more than suspected him last night! for had I been certain of his identity, I do not know what rash thing, under a sudden, wild impulse, I might not have done. I verily believe I should have attempted his life; and whether I succeeded or failed, I should have got myself and you into most serious difficulty. I am rejoiced all has happened as it has; for now I know where to look for him, and am prepared to fight him invisibly, with the subtle weapons of cunning and stratagem. And now,

Harry, we must make our way, as fast as possible, to the inn on the main road, where, if horses can be procured, we will set forward at such speed as money can purchase. I feel there is no time to delay: in the hands of such a villain, Viola is not safe a day. Oh, that I had wings to fly to her rescue! What if he should *force* her into a marriage, Harry?"

"He will not venture so much, so soon, I think, Morton."

"I pray he may not!" said Harley, in a tone of suppressed passion, his eyes gleaming with a wild, fearful light; "I pray he may not! earnestly pray he may not! for her sake, his sake, my own;—but if he *do* thus wrong her, Harry, by that awful, dread eternity to which we are hastening! I solemnly swear, not to rest, day nor night, till she is avenged—terribly, bloodily avenged!"

About a mile beyond the inn where we had spent the night, the narrow road we were pursuing, forked. We took the right, and were glad to perceive the carriage of D'Estang had done the same. A mile, or perhaps a little more than a mile, still further on, we again struck the main road, much to our delight—for though neither of us were cowards, to fear each bush and shadow, yet there was something extremely unpleasant in travelling a solitary path, through a dense, dark wood, in a section of country which we had good reason for believing was infested by those who would stop at no crime which might stand between them and the object they sought, whatever that might be.

Some two hours after reaching the main road, we arrived at a very genteel way-side inn, where we succeeded in procuring a conveyance to the next village, some ten miles distant. Here we fortunately secured fast horses and a guide, which set us forward some twenty-five miles in three hours. Our next and last stage was performed in a four-

wheeled vehicle. We crossed the Brazos about dark, and an hour later had arrived at our destination for the day.

We were now within three miles of D'Estang Ville; and at the inn where we put up for the night, we made casual inquiries about the surrounding country—the general character of the inhabitants—and of course, among the rest, did not neglect to question concerning him with whom we expected to have most to do. What we gathered of the latter, was in substance, that Captain—or, as he was here generally termed, Count D'Estang—was a French nobleman, of great wealth, who owned and worked one of the largest cotton plantations on the Brazos. D'Estang Ville, his private residence, was said to be the most charming and magnificent in all Texas; and here, when at home, for he was much abroad, he lived in a style of sumptuous splendor. He not unfrequently held revels at his mansion; but only here and there a neighbor attended—most of the guests being from a distance, and strangers to all but the host. When questioned as to the moral character of Count D'Estang, our informants shook their heads significantly, and said that there were strange reports abroad that his gains were not all honestly come by, though none dared accuse him of crime. He was considered a *roue;* and some hinted that tales might be told of innocence wronged, hopes blasted, and hearts broken—only that those who could speak, had their lips sealed by self-interest and fear. He was regarded as a dark man, rich and powerful, and more to be feared than loved. At present, rumor was busy concerning a new victim, who had mysteriously arrived in the night, in a close carriage; but further than this, no one knew anything; and even this was rather guessed at, we found, than positively known.

Such was the substance of what we learned from the citizens of——But the place shall be nameless. When

alone with me, Harley groaned in anguish of spirit, and then knit his brows, and ground his teeth with rage.

"Oh! Harry," he said, "think of the latest victim!—who can it be but Viola? Oh! it is terrible! terrible! The monster fiend! May the sure justice of Heaven speedily overtake him! One night more of miserable suspense, and then to know the worst; and if the worst has befallen her—then, in the presence of the Omnipotent, do I consecrate this life to avenge her."

I endeavored to tranquilize him, but for a long time in vain. At last he grew calmer, and we discussed our plans for the morrow.

Though greatly fatigued, we slept but little that night.

CHAPTER XIII.

D'ESTANG VILLE.

It was a beautiful morning, toward the close of September, that our eyes were first greeted with a view of D'Estang Ville; and never had I beheld a combination of nature and art so superbly charming, so supremely enchanting. From our point of observation, a very slight eminence, we saw a large, angular mansion, with its porticoes, piazzas, colonnades, balconies, turrets, roofs, and chimneys, lifting itself above a level landscape, in the centre of a charming grove, and surrounded also by vines, and flowers, and arbors, and statues, and sparkling fountains, and winding walks, that led from sunshine to shade, and from shade into darker recesses, which, from where we were, our gaze could not penetrate. The mansion itself stood back from the road some quarter of a mile, and could be approached, in a direct line, along a bowery footway, lined with statuary, and banked with the rarest, brightest and sweetest of flowers, whose perfume regaled the olfactory sense almost to satiety, and where all the externals, including the gay-plumed warblers fluttering and singing among the green branches overhead, made it seem enchanted ground—or it could be approached by a carriage road, scarcely less delightful, which made a circuit from one gate of the front enclosure to the other, a distance of nearly a mile. In the rear of the mansion was a group of picturesque outbuildings, in the same fancy style of architecture, half embowered in a level park, that stretched far,

far away, reminding me of the world-renowned Elysian Fields. No description can do justice to the scene, as it burst upon our view under the rich light of a morning sun shining through a soft, clear, cloudless atmosphere of cerulean blue; and I must leave the reader to fill out the picture with all he can imagine of the beautiful, assuring him he is more likely to fall short of, than to exceed, the reality.

For ten minutes, to say the least, we stood and gazed upon the bright landscape before us, without speaking; and then turning to me:

"What poet could dream of more?" sighed Harley: "it ravishes the sight; and oh! to think that yonder lovely retreat is the present abode of an angel and a devil!"

"Had Eden been more than this, methinks our first parents could not have survived the loss," returned I.

"With that and Viola, my Heaven would begin on earth," said Harley.

"With that and Clara, amen!" thought I

"Come," pursued Harley, "while we stand idly here, we accomplish nothing. You know my plan—so let us forward."

"I fear you will find it less easy to execute than you thought," I rejoined; "but I am yours to command."

As we were about to descend to the road, which ran along before us at the distance of a hundred yards or so, our attention was arrested by the appearance of a horseman, who suddenly emerged from among the trees near the mansion, and advanced along the graveled path toward one of the gates at an easy canter. We stopped to note his movements, and as he drew nearer,

"How is it, Harry—do my eyes deceive me—or is that D'Estang himself?" said Harley.

"I would not be positive at this distance," I replied; "but I think it is the Count."

"If it is he, and he about to leave, in so much are we fortunate," replied my friend.

The horseman rode down to the gate; and after passing a few words with the porter, who gave him exit, he dashed away, and soon was out of sight.

"Come, Harry, now is our time."

We took a short circuit, and came round to the gate through which the horseman had passed, with our boxes slung under our arms, in the most approved mode of pedestrian itineracy. As to Tom, by-the-way, we had thought it advisable to leave him behind us at our last stopping place.

A strong wall of masonry, about ten feet in height, enclosed the grounds of D'Estang Ville on every side; and this wall, where it fronted on the road, had three gates, with a porter's lodge and tower to each, in which as regular a watch was kept as if it were a fortified place. Without permission of some one of these sentries, therefore, no one could enter or leave the grounds; and to get this permit, as mere strolling peddlers, we feared might be no easy matter.

"Money is the Archimedean lever of the present century," said Harley, as we discussed the matter on our way thither; "and with a foothold by yon gate, we will test its power."

The porter, Harley at once perceived, was a Frenchman; and he addressed him very politely, asking permission for us to enter and offer our wares for sale to such as we might find within, either lord or dependant.

"His lordship has just ridden away," replied the man, "and it is against the rules to admit strangers during his absence."

"How long will his lordship be away?" inquired my friend.

"Till to-morrow morning, doubtless."

"Well, can you not give us a chance to turn an honest penny?"

"I would like to oblige—but—"

"Here," interrupted Harley, reaching a gold coin through the wicket—"say no more, my good fellow, but let us pass."

The man hesitated, looked at the coin wistfully, rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and finally said, as his fingers closed upon it:

"Well, to oblige you, I will let you in; but do not stay too long—for should his lordship return and find you here, I fear it would be the worse for all of us."

"Oh, we will not remain longer than is necessary for our purpose," replied Harley, blandly, as we passed through the gate, and set off for the mansion. "How fortunate for us," he added to me, when out of ear-shot of the porter, "that the Count is away! Ah! Harry—fate! fate! it favors us still."

"But should the Count unexpectedly return?" I suggested.

"Ah! should he, Harry—should he—there is no telling what might be the consequences. But we will hope for the best, Harry, and we must improve our time. If Viola is within that mansion, I must see her; and oh! the very thought of accomplishing my purpose, makes me tremble! I feel we are playing a bold, desperate game—but then look at the stakes! If I win, happiness and life—if I lose, misery and perchance death. Harry, (and Harley grasped my hand,) you will stand by me, let what will happen?"

"To the death, Morton."

His fingers closed upon mine like a vice.

"Thank you! thank you!" he said, hurriedly, brushing away a tear. "You are indeed a true friend, and I bless the hour that brought us together. I may be compelled to try you to the full extent of your generous offer—though I hope not—I pray not. Oh! Harry, you do not know my feelings at this moment—you cannot realize the awful conflict going on in my breast, between hope and fear. But I must see Viola; and if beneath yonder roof I will, or they shall bear me hence a corpse. Fail! fail! oh! I must not fail!—we must not fail, Harry!—oh! great Heaven grant we do not fail!"

Under any other circumstances, we could not have passed through those beautiful grounds, without stopping to admire the green, shady, cooling groves—the bright beds of flowers—the pellucid fountains, sending up jets of silver in the sunshine—the life-like statuary—and the natural melody of a thousand feathered warblers—the whole forming a scene of beauty and enchantment rivalled only by the magnificent homes of foreign nobility; but now we had other matters to occupy our thoughts, and we only paid them the tribute of a passing glance.

At length we reached a vine-covered portico, and beheld, through the open door, a lofty, magnificent hall, hung round with paintings, aud furnished in a manner at once unique, sombre, and grand. Harley rang the bell; and immediately a French porter appeared, dressed in livery, who, with an air of surprise, eyed us from head to foot.

"We have called to show the lady of this beautiful mansion some very fine jewelry," said Harley, tapping his box, and touching his hat with an air of respect.

"How do you know there is a lady to show your wares to?" returned the man, with a self-important air.

"Oh, I take it for granted that such a palace as this is not without its queen. Come, come—do not be too hard on us poor fellows.; we must live, you know, as well as others. There, now, I see a kindly look in your handsome face, and I know you will procure us an interview with your mistress."

"You are out there, my jolly tinkers," replied the man, good-humoredly, for he was very susceptible of flattery. "You are out there, now, about my mistress."

"How so?"

"Because I have none."

"Ha! no mistress?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet? Ah! that implies you are about to have?"

"Well, one cannot say what may happen in that way, with a good-looking-master."

"Very true. So, then, there is no lady within the mansion?"

"I didn't say that," replied the porter, with a peculiar smile, that made the heart of Harley beat violently—though he mastered himself, so as outwardly to appear calm and almost indifferent: "I didn't say there was no lady within; I only said I had no mistress."

"Yes, I see! good joke! capital! ha, ha, ha!" rejoined Harley, affecting to perceive no small amount of wit in the other's remark, which tended not a little to increase the man's favorable opinion of ourselves. "Well, come, now," pursued Harley, "can you not procure us an interview with this lady?—doubtless she would like something in our line."

"Rather difficult to do, I'm afraid," answered the other.

"Oh, give me you for difficult undertakings—especially when a lady is concerned—I can see it in your eye," laughed Harley. "Come, try now, my good fellow, and

here is a trifle to compensate you for your trouble;" and my friend slipped a half-dollar into the porter's hand.

"I see you understand your business," smiled the other. "Well, I will do my best for you. I will see Mistress Anne, who has charge of the lady. Walk in, and amuse yourselves with the paintings and curiosities here, if you like, till I return."

"Thank you! we will do so," returned Harley; and the porter departed, leaving us to ourselves.

Under different circumstances, we might have spent a day, agreeably, in gazing upon the works of art which that magnificent hall contained; but now we scarcely bestowed upon them a single glance.

"Do you think the lady in question is Viola?" I whispered.

"My heart tells me so," was the reply.

After a painful suspense of some five or ten minutes, the porter reappeared.

"Well?" said Harley.

"I saw Mistress Anne—but she is in a bad humor and I could do nothing with her," replied the porter

"What did she say?"

"Why," answered the other, hesitating, "when I told her your business, she said—but you musn't get offended now!"

"Go on!"

"Why, she said the young lady was not a going to be disturbed with any such strolling vagabonds as peddlers."

"Umph! she is complimentary, certainly," said Harley. "So the lady herself is young, eh?"

"Yes, and so beautiful!"

"And had she nothing to say in the matter?"

"I didn't see her; we are not allowed: all business with her must pass through Mistress Anne."

"Ah, indeed! Well, and who is this lady you speak of that is so beautiful—what is her name?" inquired my friend, carelessly.

"Why, that's more than I can say," answered the porter, looking round him mysteriously; "though I have heard," he added, in a low tone, "that she is soon to become the wife of his lordship."

"Aha! so-so! How long has she been here?"

"Only two or three days; but not a word of this to any one, or I may lose my ears."

"Ha! it is a secret, then?"

"Yes, my lord wouldn't have it known; in fact, he don't like to have anything concerning any of his affairs known; very secret in everything is his lordship."

"Did the lady come here by herself?"

"Oh, no: her father came with her, I believe.'

"Is he here now?"

"Can't say—have never seen him but twice, and the last time was the day after they arrived."

"But you have seen the lady?"

"Once—only once. I stood in the hall as she passed through, leaning on a strange gentleman's arm, that I've since heard was her father. Her veil was a little aside, and I had a glimpse of her face."

"And have you only seen her that once?"

"Only that once."

"How is that?"

"She doesn't leave her apartments, and we gentlemen are not allowed to enter there."

"Is she a prisoner?"

"I don't know," said the porter, again looking cautiously round; "but some of us think that may-be she's refractory, and that his lordship is taming her."

"Oho! I see!" returned Harley, with a significant

smile. "Well, I wish we could see her—perhaps we could prevail upon her to trade with us—she may like our wares to amuse herself with."

"Well, the thing can't be done without the consent of Mistress Anne, and that I'm satisfied I can't obtain."

"And could we not see Mistress Anne, whoever she is?"

"Oh, yes."

"Very well," said Harley, slipping another silver coin into the hands of the porter,—"pray procure us an interview with Mistress Anne."

"Follow me, then," returned the latter.

He led the way to a broad flight of winding stairs, which we ascended to the second story, when, turning to the right, we entered a narrow corridor, which meandered through the mansion, and conducted us to a sort of tower, which was connected with the main building by a narrow bridge that passed over a portion of an inner court. This tower, as for convenience I shall term it, stood in the centre of a grass-plot—which was itself completely surrounded by the main buildings of the Ville—and could only be entered, apparently, by means of the bridge, which could be raised by machinery at the pleasure of the owner—so that a person confined therein, could be made almost as safe a prisoner, as in the castle-towers of the olden time. I say this tower could only *apparently* be entered and left by the bridge in question—for there was in reality a secret passage under ground, which I shall have occasion to refer to hereafter. There were no windows in this tower below the second story; and these, and those of the third story—for it was three stories in height—were long and narrow, resembling those I have seen in a State's prison.

After crossing the draw-bridge, we entered a circular apartment, furnished in a style of magnificence I have

seldom seen equaled. A rich Turkey carpet covered the floor, on which stood sofas, ottomans, and centre-tables, loaded with books and shells, and the walls were adorned with full-length mirrors and exquisite paintings. Here, on a sofa, with a book in her hand, sat Mistress Anne, as she was termed, bedecked with more finery, in the way of silks and jewelry, than was in good taste. Her hair and eyes were very black, and the latter shrewd and piercing in expression. She was apparently about twenty years of age, and many would term her beautiful; but her features were too narrow and pointed, her lips too thin and compressed, her skin too pale, save where art had bestowed a color, to come up to my standard of female beauty.

On our entrance, she looked up in surprise, threw down her book, rose from her seat, and advancing to us with a hasty step, exclaimed, in a quick, sharp, angry tone:

"What means this intrusion of strangers?"

"Ah, Mistress Anne," said the porter, coaxingly, "these are the peddlers I was speaking to you about."

"Well, did I not tell you the young lady would see no such strolling vagabonds?" she indignantly and scornfully rejoined, turning sharply upon our conductor, her eyes flashing fire.

"But they asked to see you, and I could hardly do less than grant them that happiness," replied the other, with a sort of covert irony.

"And did your master tell you to do this?" she demanded, almost fiercely, crossing her arms on her breast, and bestowing upon the porter a withering look.

"No, his lordship didn't, but politeness did," returned the other.

"And think you, Pierre, politeness will save you from his lordship's anger?" she cried, with a contemptuous curl of her thin lips.

"But surely, Mistress Anne, you will not inform on me!" said Pierre, beginning to grow alarmed for the first time

"Won't I, though?" she rejoined; "wait till he comes, and see."

"Ah, Mistress Anne, now surely I meant no harm," pleaded the other, turning pale.

"You meant no good, I'll be bound. This is not the first time you have been remiss in your duty; and come what will of it, his lordship shall know of it. What! force a couple of strolling vagabonds upon my privacy, without my leave! I am astonished at your audacity. Go! get you hence! and take these fellows with you—or you shall learn, and that quickly, what it is to brave *my* displeasure;" and she drew herself up with queenly haughtiness.

"Say what you will of us, fair lady," interposed Harley, in a bland tone—"but do not be too hard on Pierre, who is far less to blame than we."

"But he had no business to bring you here without my consent," said the indignant damsel, turning to my friend, and speaking in a modified tone.

"He may have done wrong in that, fair lady," replied Harley, in the same bland, respectful manner; "but we were so anxious to see you, that we hardly gave him a choice."

"Well, now that you do see me, pray state your business!" returned the other, in a tone greatly softened, showing that the flattering term of "fair lady," so cleverly introduced, was not without its effect upon one as vain as she was arrogant.

"I would prefer stating my business to you alone, fair damsel," rejoined Harley, glancing significantly at the porter.

"You may go, Pierre," she said, with a courtly wave of her white arm and hand.

"But, Mistress Anne, you will not tell his lordship?" returned Pierre, hesitating.

"No—in compliment to these gentlemen, I will overlook this offence," she answered, graciously. "There! go!"

As the porter went out, Mistress Anne threw herself upon a sofa, with an air, saying:

"Seats, gentlemen."

"I see Pierre has left the door slightly ajar," said Harley; "and with your kind permission, ma'm'selle, I will close it."

"Certainly;" and Anne bowed a gracious acquiescence.

The key was in the lock; and, by a dexterous movement, Harley shot the bolt and withdrew it, without being perceived by Anne.

She was a prisoner without knowing it.

CHAPTER XIV

MISTRESS ANNE.

"THE truth is," resumed Harley, seating himself near the damsel, "we have some very fine jewelry in our boxes; and learning from Pierre that there is a young and beautiful lady within the mansion, who is about to become the wife of his lordship, we felt a great desire to see her, and lay before her our fine assortment of gold and diamonds."

"And is this your business with me?" cried Anne, her pale features again flushing, and her black eyes flashing.

"Pray do not get angry, ma'm'selle; we are not the persons to forget what is due to one in your station," pursued Harley. "If we see the lady herself, it will be through the kindness of one who has no reason, perhaps, to be envious of her beauty; and for this kindness, we shall pray you to accept a slight token of our regard." While speaking, Harley opened his box, and selecting a gold ring of exquisite workmanship, and presenting it to Anne, continued: "Pray honor us by placing this on your beautiful finger."

Anne took the ring, and fixing her eyes on it, and turning it over and over, said, in pursuance of her thoughts as it were:

"And so that gossiping porter told you this lady, whom I condescend to wait upon, just to please my lord, is about to become his lordship's wife?"

"He either said or intimated as much, ma'm'selle—or, at all events, I inferred that from what he did say."

"Pierre is a fool!" cried Mistress Anne, indignantly, stamping her little foot upon the soft carpet. "A fool! a gossiping fool! that he is; and this meddling with affairs that do not concern him, will cost him dear, or I know not Count D'Estang."

"But I beg you will not get him into trouble on our account," returned Harley, soothingly. "I assure you that what he said to us, will go no further; and whether true or not, I can see no harm in his lordship's wishing to be wedded to a suitable personage."

"But I can," cried Anne, starting to her feet, and beginning to pace the room with hurried steps. "But I can see harm in it;" and her eyes displayed a glare of fierceness that denoted the workings of a dark, vindictive spirit. "Besides," she continued, "this girl is *not* a fit consort for his lordship; and by all the powers that be, good or evil, he shall never wed her!" and the words rang out with a wild, startling vehemence.

"Who will prevent it?" ventured Harley.

"I will!" cried Anne, suddenly confronting my friend; "do you doubt it?"

"Why should I?" he answered, evasively. "But come! tell us more of your mistress."

"She is not my mistress—the proud, scornful upstart—nor shall she ever be."

"Then she is proud and scornful?"

"Ay; but I will humble her; she had better not put on too many airs with me."

"And does she fancy his lordship?"

"Who cares whether she does or not? what is that to you?"

"Oh, I merely asked the question, as our conversation led to it."

"Our conversation has led too far," returned Anne,

coldly, the idea apparently striking her that she had been too communicative to utter strangers. "I should not have said so much," she pursued; "but I forgot myself."

"Well, since you have said so much, suppose you go on and give us the whole story," suggested Harley.

"Umph! that you may retail the gossip as you do your wares."

"No, upon my honor, if you will state the whole case to me, I will tell you how best you may rid yourself of this lady—since I see, from your remarks, that such is your desire."

"And who are you, that are so ready to interfere in other people's affairs?" said Anne, a slight shade of suspicion apparently crossing her mind, that we might be other than we seemed.

"Do you not see who we are?" returned Harley, pointing to our boxes.

"I see what you profess to be; but why do you take so much interest in this matter?"

"Could we do otherwise, after what you have said?"

"I see—I have said too much."

"But cannot unsay it now, ma'm'selle."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Anne, in some trepidation; "perhaps you are friends of his lordship!"

Harley saw he had gained an advantage over the girl, through her own suspicions and imprudent admissions, and he determined on making the most of it, by working on her fears.

"Well, whatever we are," he answered, "one thing is certain—you are in our power."

"Heavens! what have I done?" cried the damsel, sinking upon a seat, pale and trembling.

"I will tell you what you have done," returned Harley,

sternly; "you have spoken words that, if reported to his lordship, may cost you dear."

"Do you know him?" gasped Anne.

"We do."

"Oh! mercy on me! then I am ruined."

"That depends upon how you conduct yourself hereafter."

"Who are you?"

"Do you not see?"

"But you are not what you seem!"

"So much the worse for you."

"Oh! gracious Heaven! what shall I do!"

"First tell us all you know of this lady, and what treatment she has received at your hands."

"Do you know her, too?"

"I can answer best when I have heard the name."

"Oh, gentlemen, if you are really friends of his lordship, promise not to get me into trouble!"

"I will only promise, that if you do not answer my questions, it shall be the worse for you. Come! give us this lady's name!"

"I only know her as Ma'm'selle Viola," replied the now really frightened damsel; "but oh! gentlemen—"

"Hush!" interrupted Harley, sternly—"and confine yourself to straightforward answers! How came she here?"

"She was brought here by his lordship. But if you were sent by him, you knew this before."

"No matter what we know, but mind you give direct answers. Did she come here alone with Count D'Estang?"

"No, a gentleman came with her, that I have heard was her father."

"Where is he now?"

"I do not know."

"Nay, speak the truth!"

"Upon my soul, I do not know! I have not seen him since the morning after."

"Well, why is this lady kept within this tower, and not allowed to leave?"

"My lord so commanded—and who dare disobey him?"

"And you, I suppose, are her keeper?"

"I am forbidden to let her leave her apartment."

"And where is that?"

"Overhead."

"And does the Count really intend to marry her?"

"So he says."

"Well, has she consented to wed the Count?"

"No, and that is why she is confined—he has told her she shall only go forth as his bride."

"But you say she shall never wed him!"

"Ah! sir, I was only jesting; how could a poor girl like me oppose so powerful a gentleman as my lord?"

"Girl!" said Harley, sternly, fixing his keen eyes searchingly upon her—"you have been meditating harm to this lady!"

Anne shrank back, terrified.

"Oh! sir—"

"The truth!" interrupted Harley—"and nothing but the truth!"

"Oh! sir, how could you for a moment think that I—"

"The truth, I say!" stamped Harley. "I tell you, girl, you have meditated harm to her!—perhaps you have thought to poison her!"

Anne uttered a faint cry of terror, and covered her face with her hands.

"Confess the fact!" pursued Harley: "It will be better for you, I assure you!"

"I could not bear that she should wed the Count," sobbed Anne.

"And why? what is it to you whom she weds?"

"I care not whom *she* weds, so it is not my lord."

"And why do you object to him?"

"Because I love him!" cried Anne, hysterically.

"And so you have looked to become mistress of D'Estang Ville yourself, eh?"

"I have been mistress—I was mistress till she came," cried the other, with a passionate burst.

"And so you have aspired to be the wife of his lordship?"

"He promised me I should be," pursued the excited damsel; "and why has he broken his promise?"

"Come, come—softly, now—calm yourself."

"*Calm* myself!" echoed Anne, looking up with a strange, wild, peculiar expression: "yes, I will calm myself—*in the grave.*"

"What mean you by those words?"

"Do you think I'll live disgraced, and out of favor with my lord? No! never! never!" she cried, with wild vehemence. "I have told so much, I will now tell all," she continued. "I *did* intend to kill this lady, if she consented to wed my lord, and then myself. My plan was well laid; and here (producing a small vial) I have a poison, as quick as lightning in its operations. Since I am detected through my own foolishness, I will not live disgraced and degraded both. Sir! Count D'Estang deceived me with false promises — but, notwithstanding, I have ever loved him; and, strange as it may seem, I do so still. Tell him this; and say I died with his name upon my tongue, blessing him in my heart."

As she ceased speaking, she raised the vial to her lips; but with a cry of horror, Harley sprung forward, just in time to dash it to the ground. The next moment a dagger, hitherto concealed, was gleaming in her hand, and would

instantly have been buried in her heart—for Harley's eyes had followed the vial, and were not observing her—had I not rushed forward and caught the uplifted arm. She struggled violently to free herself; but I succeeded in wrenching the weapon from her grasp, when she sunk back hysterically upon the sofa.

"Calm yourself, lady," I said; "we will do you no harm; you mistake us and our purpose."

She glared upon me fiercely, exclaiming:

"You triumph now; but I warn you I will find a way to put an end to myself before his lordship returns; you shall not drag me living before him."

"You mistake us," we both said in the same breath. "We are not spies upon you," I continued. "Our purpose here is to liberate this lady; and if you will assist us, his lordship shall know of nothing that has passed between us."

"Are you friends of Ma'm'selle Viola? and were you not sent here by his lordship?" she cried, eagerly.

"We are friends of Ma'm'selle Viola, and were not sent hither by his lordship," we both hastened to assure her.

"Oh, thanks!" she cried: "thanks! double thanks for this news, and the saving of my life!"

"Will you assist us to liberate Viola, ere his lordship returns?" inquired Harley.

"I will do what I can; but I fear it cannot be done," she answered.

"Will you follow our directions in everything?" pursued Harley.

"So they do not lead to exposing me to the Count, I will," she replied.

"Swear it!"

"As I hope for the favor of my lord, and one moment's

happiness in this world or the next, I swear!" she said, solemnly.

"Enough! now tell us how many servants there are about the mansion?"

"Ten here at present."

"I have seen only the porter—how is that

"They are probably out in the park, or in the rear buildings," she answered.

"Perhaps we have been overheard?" suggested Harley, a new thought striking him.

Anne cast her eyes hurriedly around the circular apartment, to the four narrow windows which were placed in the four points of compass, and rejoined:

"No, fortunately, the windows were all closed—and the door being shut, nothing short of a scream could reach the ear of any without."

"'Tis well; then you only know our secret; and with your assistance, if uninterrupted, we may accomplish wonders in a very short time. Viola, you say, is above us?"

"Yes."

"Can she have heard anything that has passed between us?"

"No," replied Anne; "for these apartments are so constructed, that sound will not pass from one to the other."

"And for what purpose was this tower built?" I inquired.

"That I do not know," answered the damsel. "It has an observatory on the top; and his lordship, who is a gentleman of science, often amuses himself there, at night, looking at the heavens."

"Is there any way to leave this tower save by the bridge?" inquired Harley.

"I believe there is one other way—but it is a secret only known to his lordship," replied the girl.

"That other way we must discover," said Harley, glancing round the apartment. "But first we must see Viola. Show us the way to her chamber, Anne!"

The damsel advanced to a large painting, that came down near the ground, touched a secret spring, when it swung slowly back, disclosing a kind of closet, with steep, narrow, winding stairs leading to the story above. Harley pressed my arm, made a significant gesture, and said aloud:

"On further reflection, you shall go first, Harry, and explain all to her—for should she recognise me suddenly, it might overcome her. I will remain here with this lady till you return."

I knew Harley less feared a recognition—for he was still disguised, in the manner previously described to the reader—than that the girl might change her mind, if left to herself, and manage some way to secure us in a trap; but I replied, carelessly:

"Ah, perhaps it would be better, for me she has never seen."

"When you reach the top stair," said Anne, who made no objection to this arrangement, "if you place your hand to the right, you will find an aperture just large enough for your fingers, and in there you will feel a spring—press that hard, and a door will open."

I ascended the narrow, winding stairs in twilight darkness, with singular feelings, as the reader will readily believe. I was about to behold the fair being that had so enraptured my friend, of whom I had heard so much, and whose singular history I knew was in itself a living romance. At length I stood upon the upper stair, in almost total darkness — for the only light here was what had struggled up through the half open door below. I placed my hand against the wall to the right, found the aperture,

and in it the secret spring. I pressed hard against the spring, a portion of the wall seemed slowly to give way, a bright light shone in upon me, and taking, a step or two forward, I stood in the upper chamber of the tower, and in the prison of Viola St. Auburn.

CHAPTER XV.

MYSTERIES OF THE TOWER.

THE apartment I had so unceremoniously entered, without giving its fair tenant any warning of my approach, was small and circular, like the one below, with its four long narrow windows looking to the four points of the compass, and was furnished, carpeted, and decorated in the same style, with sofas, ottomans, tables, mirrors and paintings. The windows here were open, and were withal so high above the ground, that a goodly portion of the park could be seen over the angular roofs of the surrounding buildings; and the summit of the tower, one story higher still, commanded a view, not only of the grounds of D'Estang Ville, but of the adjacent country for miles around.

I glanced around the chamber; but of all I saw, only one object arrested my attention, and this enchained it. It was a beautiful female, just in the bloom of life, whose attitude was that of one startled to her feet by the abrupt and unexpected intrusion of a stranger. I had only time to note that she was robed in white, with golden ringlets flowing carelessly down around her face and neck, and over a portion of her snowy garments—that her eyes were bright and sparkling—that her features were very pale, but radiant with no common intellect—when, advancing a step or two, with lady-like grace, she said, in a clear, silvery voice, which, though soft, had a peculiar ring of courtly pride, if I may so express myself:

"May I know why I am honored with this unexpected visit of a stranger?"

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Miss Viola St. Auburn?" I said, in reply.

"That is my name, sir," she answered, with a courtly bow, and an air of condescension.

"Then permit me to say, Miss St. Auburn, I bring you good tidings."

"They could never come in a time more needed," she rejoined, with something like a sigh; "for good tidings have of late been strangers to me. Am I honored with the visit of an emissary of Count D'Estang's?" she inquired; and I fancied there was a certain degree of irony in her tone.

"No, Miss St. Auburn," I replied, "I come from one whom I have reason to know is an enemy of his lordship, and a true friend of the lady I address."

A change like lightning came over her countenance—a bright ray of hope animated her features, making them beautiful beyond description — and slightly raising her hands, and taking a quick step or two forward, with her eyes fixed intently on mine, she exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest anxiety:

"Speak! his name?"

"Morton Harley."

"God be praised!—at last!" she ejaculated; and dropping her head upon her heaving bosom, and sinking upon a seat near, she covered her face and burst into tears.

If the mere mention of my having come from one she so dearly loved, could excite such deep emotions in the breast of Viola, I felt that Harley had acted with his usual wisdom in not disclosing himself to her too suddenly. As soon as she could in any degree regain composure, she looked up quickly, fixed her eyes piercingly upon me—with

an expression of hope, and fear, and doubt—and exclaimed, eagerly:

"You are not deceiving me, sir?"

"Upon my honor, as a gentleman, no, Miss St. Auburn," I replied; and I felt there was something convincing in my look that my words were words of truth. "Morton Harley and I are friends," I went on to say: "my name is Henry Walton; we first met in Virginia, my native place—afterward on the Ohio; we have ever since been companions; he has honored me with his confidence; and we have come hither expressly in search of yourself, with a view to relieve you from captivity."

"Thanks! sir—thanks! Oh, I could bless you on my knees!" she cried, hurriedly, coming forward and taking my hand. "You must excuse my weakness and doubt, Mr. Walton; but oh, sir, could you know what I have suffered! You said *we*, Mr. Walton: Is he—is Morton—is Mr. Harley then with you?"

"In the room below," I answered.

"Oh, Heavens! so near?" she exclaimed. "But how did you obtain access to this prison? for I can call it by no milder term."

I hurriedly gave her the particulars, alluded to her letter, mentioned the disguise of my friend, and concluded by saying:

"And for the rest, Miss St. Auburn, you shall have it from the lips of Morton Harley himself, whom I will immediately send to you."

I then bowed myself out, leaving her seated upon a sofa, pale and agitated.

"Well," exclaimed Harley, as I entered the chamber below, "have you seen her?"

"I have, Morton, and have prepared her to see you."

He grasped my hand, pressed it hard, and without a

word, but with a look I understood, disappeared up the narrow winding stairs. A moment or two after, I heard a joyful cry, and then all became still. That the lovers might have no listeners, other than themselves, I now closed the secret door, and found myself alone in the apartment with Anne.

She was standing by a large painting, a few feet distant; and as she turned her face toward me, I saw that she was more pale than usual, and very much agitated.

"Oh, sir, I am terrified!" she said, in a low, tremulous tone.

"Any new cause of alarm?" I inquired.

"I have reflected on what I have done, and am doing," she replied; "and should my lord unexpectedly return, what will become of us?"

"We will not borrow trouble," I rejoined, "but face the evil only when there is no alternative."

"Oh! sir, you do not know his lordship so well as I," she pursued, "or you would tremble at the bare thought of meeting him in an angry mood! He is terrible in his anger! and he is all-powerful to execute whatever he wills!"

"He is only a man," I said; "and though I would rather not meet, I do not fear him."

"But you know him not, sir—you know him not, I see. He is only a man himself—but he is at the head of—"

"Of a band of outlaws," I rejoined, as Anne stopped, probably bethinking herself that she was on the point of betraying a secret. "I suspected as much"

"I did not say that—I did not mean—"

"Never mind," I interrupted: "at present we will not discuss the matter. But if his lordship is so powerful, and so dreadful in his anger," I continued, "there is so much

tne more necessity that we find a speedy way to get Ma'm'selle Viola out of his clutches."

"Ah, sir, I fear it cannot be done—in fact, I am certain of it—and therefore I think it best that you and your friend depart ere an exposure takes place."

"And do you think we have ventured thus far, to be turned from our purpose now?" I rejoined, sternly. "You must have a very poor opinion of our courage and manly qualities, if, after having found the lady we came to seek, you can for a moment suppose we will go quietly away, and leave her in the hands of a villain, and a victim to your jealousy!"

"But I will swear, most sacredly, never to injure a hair of her head."

"It is useless to talk, girl—we are determined upon our course."

"And what is that?" she asked, in an excited tone.

"Not to quit D'Estang Ville, unless Viola St. Auburn goes with us."

"But if I convince you she cannot escape?"

"Then we shall remain to brave the anger of this terrible Count."

"But in his rage he may kill you!"

"We take our chance, of course."

"Heavens! I tremble at the consequences! Will nothing induce you to depart without her?"

"No, nothing."

"But suppose I summon my lord's domestics, and have you forcibly ejected?"

"What! after the oath you have taken to assist us?"

"But circumstances may compel me to break that oath!"

"It shall be our care, then, you do not have an opportunity. Since you have hinted at treachery, therefore, I

feel justified in telling you, you are yourself a prisoner in this tower."

"Indeed!" returned the damsel, with flashing eyes. "Since you talk thus, I feel justified in testing your assertion;" and she sprung away to the door. "Locked!" she cried, in a tone of alarm, recoiling in dismay.

"You see, girl, I have not made any vain boast."

"Oh! Heavens! Heavens! what shall I do?" she cried.

"Find a way for us to escape with Ma'm'selle Viola; and do not again attempt it yourself," I replied, severely, "or we shall be compelled to adopt harsh measures."

"But I know of no way for you to escape," she rejoined, much alarmed.

"What of the secret passage?"

"I do not know where it is; your friend and I have been searching for it; and even if found, it may not lead out of the mansion, and certainly not beyond the enclosure."

"Well," I returned, a new idea striking me, "with your approval, could we not take the porter into our confidence, and be let out through the mansion, without being disturbed?"

"How would you leave the grounds?"

"Through one of the gates."

"But suppose the porter should refuse to let you pass?"

"Our demand to be allowed to pass, might be backed by such authority as this," I replied, producing one of my revolvers.

"But if I connive at your escape, what will become of me, when his lordship returns and learns all?"

"You are the best judge of that yourself: you shall go with us if you like: one thing is certain, however—your fate cannot be worse than you had planned for yourself, if he succeeded in wedding this lady."

Anne remained thoughtful for a few moments; and then brightening at a new idea, exclaimed:

"I have it! I have it! You can perhaps effect an escape with the lady, and at the same time save me from disgrace. My plan is this: I will call in Pierre; we will frighten him, for he is timid, into compliance with our wishes; and you shall leave us both gagged and bound—so that if not liberated by the other servants, (and if so, they can testify to the fact,) we can, when his lordship returns, give out that we were overpowered, and our condition will be proof of our assertion."

"Not a bad plan," I said, approvingly.

"Then let us hasten its execution," said the damsel, eagerly. "I can soon summon Pierre, and we ought to lose no time."

"I must consult my friend," I replied.

"Oh, hasten to him, then!"

"I would rather await his return," I answered; "doubtless he will soon rejoin us."

I did not like to disturb Harley, for I knew that he and Viola had a thousand things to say to each other, which could only be said in the absence of a third party. I seated myself, therefore, in no very patient mood, for I felt that every moment was precious. Minute followed minute, but no Harley came. I grew restless and uneasy, and listened to every sound, hoping it would prove to be his footsteps on the stairs. Had he forgotten where he was, and the business that brought him here? Perhaps so—for when were lovers, alone together, ever known to act rationally and prudently, in an emergency like the present? At length I got up, and paced the room to and fro.

"Had you not better speak to your friend?" suggested Anne.

"Not yet—he will soon be here."

A half hour passed away, and my patience became exhausted.

"This will never do," I said.

I opened the secret door, and called my friend loudly by name. No answer. I called again. No answer.

"Come," I said to my companion, "we will go up to them—for I feel with you that delay is dangerous."

"I will remain here," she replied, "till you return."

"No," rejoined I, bluntly, "I cannot trust you; remember you have made one attempt at escape already."

She colored deeply, made no further objection, but reluctantly, I thought, complied with my request. We ascended to the third story chamber, the secret door of which I found closed. I knocked. No answer. Again I knocked. No answer. I listened, but could hear no sound. Half indignant that Harley could so forget himself at such a time, I pressed the spring and pushed the door open.

"I am sorry to be obliged to disturb you, but—"

I had got thus far in my speech, and my body cleverly into the chamber, when I arrested my tongue and my steps, and looked around me with an astonished and half bewildered air. The room was apparently tenantless—no Morton or Viola was visible.

"Harley!" I called, thinking he might be hiding behind some of the furniture. "Come! this is no time for practical jokes—where are you?"

No answer. I looked at Anne, who had entered the apartment behind me. She was very pale, and seemed agitated by a kind of superstitious fear—at least I fancied so.

"What means this?" I demanded.

"I do not know," she answered, in a hushed tone, with quivering lips, looking timidly around her.

"Come with me, and let us search the apartment," I

said; and I took her trembling hand, and retained it, for I was fearful she might attempt another escape and succeed.

We looked behind the sofas and ottomans, and under everything, but found nothing. Some crimson curtains hung before a small recess, which, drawn aside, disclosed a bed on which Viola had reposed of nights during her imprisonment. We looked under this, but found no traces of those of whom we were in search. Again I called Harley, loudly, some two or three times—but still received no answer.

"Girl!" I cried, grasping tightly the hand of my frightened companion—"what means this? where are they?"

"Upon my soul! I know no more than yourself, sir," she replied.

"There is a secret passage out of this chamber, other than the one by which we entered—show it to me!"

"If you were to kill me this minute," she replied, with ashy lips, and a cold tremor running through her frame, "I could not, for I know of none. Perhaps—" she hesitated, looked wildly around, and then added, pressing closer to me: "Oh! sir, this has been called the haunted chamber."

I saw she was really frightened, and I withheld the angry rejoinder that was upon my tongue. I was just beginning to feel very strangely myself, when I saw a painting, on the side we had entered, swing back, and lo! there stood Morton and Viola.

"This way, Harry! this way!" he said: "I was just coming down for you."

"Have you found the secret passage?" I exclaimed, springing forward.

"One leading up, but not down," he replied; "but I have found something else you may as well look at"

"What is it?"

"Viola will show you. Go with her, Harry, and I will remain here with Anne."

"And I may as well inform you," I rejoined, "that Mistress Anne has made one attempt at escape already."

"Ha! indeed!" said Harley, fixing his eyes keenly upon her—"I was afraid of this. Well, so much the more necessity for keeping close guard over her. And I have heard other things," he added, still keeping his eyes upon her, while hers sought the ground in confusion, "that do not reflect any great credit upon their author. However, a reckoning day must come for all. Go, Harry, and return soon, for we have no time to lose. Viola, dear, you can speak to him as if he were myself."

Viola meantime was standing in a small recess, disclosed by the swinging back of the painting just mentioned; and as she remained perfectly still, looking out upon us, robed in white, she resembled a beautiful statue in a niche. On my joining her, she impulsively seized my hand, and with tears in her eyes, exclaimed:

"Oh, Mr. Walton, Heaven grant the time may soon come when I can show you my gratitude for all you have done for me!"

I was quite taken by surprise, and in some embarrassment replied, looking alternately at her and my friend for explanation:

"Really, I am not aware what I have done, to—"

"Generous natures seldom are," interrupted Harley. "There—go now. I have merely been speaking of our friendship, and the interest you have taken in every thing that concerns me, and you see its effect upon one who is as grateful as she is true and affectionate. But go! go! and return soon."

Viola turned as Harley ceased speaking, and saying, "This way, Mr. Walton," pointed to a spiral stairway, so

steep and narrow that it was with no little difficulty we could ascend it. At the top of this we emerged through a trap door into a small, round apartment, that seemed intended to be shut out from observation, even by persons visiting the summit of the tower—which was still a few feet higher—for there appeared to be no way to pass from one to the other. There were no windows to this secret retreat; but a large, heavy, iron lamp, depending from the ceiling by an iron chain, which Viola informed me she had found lighted a few minutes before, made sombrously visible the objects in the apartment.

One hasty glance around, and I understood why Harley had wished me to come hither. In one corner stood a small, but very solid press, for steel or copperplate printing —in another a machine for die-sinking, or stamping coin; while scattered about in a careless manner, were tools of various kinds—dies—plates—"bogus," stamped and unstamped—bank notes signed and unsigned—and a hundred other things unnecessary to be mentioned.

"Well," exclaimed I, taking a rapid survey of the apartment—"so monsieur my lord is at the head of a gang of counterfeiters, as Morton and I more than suspected before we came here?"

"So it seems," replied Viola.

"But how did you find this out?"

"The Count has more than once visited me in the night, much to my alarm," she replied, in a low, quick, excited tone; "but he always treated me respectfully, with the exception of telling me I could never go forth again but as his bride—that he had sworn this, and that he was one to keep his oath. My reply, of course, has always been a firm, decided negative—though my very heart has shrunk within me when I have so spoken. Well, several times, for hours after he had left me, I heard strange noises in

this direction—and once I questioned him as to the cause. His answer, doubtless intended to frighten me, was that the room I occupied was termed the haunted chamber, and he had no other explanation for the sounds I heard. I suspected more natural causes, however; and the last time he was here, I determined, unknown to him, to watch his exit. I succeeded; and discovered that, instead of leaving the chamber by the secret door through which you entered, as had previously been my impression, he, after going to that, cast a hurried glance around, and glided to another painting, which immediately opened and closed behind him. In my conversation with Morton, I mentioned this to him; and approaching this painting, and making a careful examination, he soon discovered the spring which commanded the door; and opening the latter, we found our way hither."

"And did the Count always return through your chamber?" I inquired.

"Never, to my knowledge," answered Viola—"and from this Morton argues that there is a secret passage from here down through the tower. And besides, I have heard these strange noises at times when the Count had not previously visited me."

"He is a villain of the darkest dye, I fear," I rejoined.

"I have from the first regarded him as a bold, bad man," returned Viola, shuddering; "but I was not aware of the extent of his criminality, till I came hither—in fact I knew not of this till within the hour—though I cannot say I am surprised at it."

"I wonder you ever permitted yourself to be brought here at all," I said.

"My father insisted on it—and what could I do?—though never would I have suffered it, had I known what I now know; but I was told that, after visiting the Count's resi-

dence, if I would not consent to wed him, I should have a choice between him and a convent; and in the hope that my father would eventually relent from his stern determination, should I in part comply with his whim, I reluctantly assented to the arrangement—though not, I must confess, without some dark forebodings of the troubles that have come upon me."

"And could your father be so cruel as to forfeit his word after you came here, and no longer give you a choice, save between becoming the wife of this villanous Count and being a close prisoner in this tower?"

"Alas! I know not how to answer you," replied Viola, in a dejected tone; "for I have not seen my father since the morning after my arrival; and then he came and departed with Count D'Estang. He seemed in a sadder mood than usual; and ere they left the apartment, some words passed between them, that I fancied, for I could not distinguish what was said, were not of the most amicable nature. Morton is apprehensive he has met with foul play; but, oh Heaven! I hope not—for much as he has wronged me, he is still my father, and I would have no harm befall him. Besides, the Count has always assured me that he is well, and that on the day I consent to become his wife, he shall reappear to congratulate me. This positive assurance, coupled with his absence, and the fact that neither the porter nor this girl, as Morton tells me, have seen him since that morning—leads me to think he may perhaps, like myself, be a prisoner within this very tower."

"But why, Viola, (if you will permit me as a friend to make use of the name most familiar to me)—why, think you, does this Count persist in wishing to marry you against your inclination?"

"I really cannot say, unless it is because he has said he would do it, sworn he would do it, and is determined to

make his word good, let the consequences be what they may. Oh, merciful Heaven! that we were all safely out of his clutches!"

"And, Heaven aid us! we soon shall be," I rejoined. "Cheer up, Viola—you are now with friends, who will only quit you with life, or when you are again in safety."

"Oh, how can I sufficiently thank you!" she again exclaimed, her soft, dark eyes filling with tears of gratitude. "I can understand why dear Morton has ventured so much—but you are, comparatively speaking, a stranger."

"Say no more, Viola—say no more—but know that your safety shall henceforth be as much my care as his who is our mutual friend." She would have again replied, but I hastened to add: "Come! with your permission, we will rejoin Morton—for I have a plan to lay before him, by which I hope to effect a speedy escape."

We found Harley busy with another painting, nearly opposite our place of entrance, with Mistress Anne seated near, sobbing half hysterically.

"Well, Harry, you saw!" he exclaimed.

"What proves you right in your surmise," I rejoined.

"We may, if we get away in time, make this discovery rather troublesome to his *lordship;*" and there was a sarcastic emphasis on the last word.

"And I have a plan which may give us speedy release," I replied; and I hurriedly put Harley in possession of the conversation held with Anne regarding our escape.

"I like it," he rejoined, "for it is more likely to be successful than the other, and will save us the trouble of looking for this secret passage. You consent to this, Anne?"

"So you will leave me gagged and bound," she answered.

"Oh, never fear but we will do that," said Harley, with

a comical expression, that, serious as I felt, forced me to smile.

"But my father!" now interposed Viola: "he must not be left here a prisoner!"

"If your father is a prisoner here, dear Viola," replied Harley, a dark frown settling on his brow, "he owes it to himself—to the scheme of villany he attempted to practise against you—and I have no sympathy with him whatever."

"But still, Morton, dear Morton, he is my father," said Viola, gently, approaching him she addressed, resting her soft white hand upon his shoulder, and letting her bright dark eyes, all eloquent with love, beam tenderly and pleadingly upon his. "He is my father, dear Morton; and were he to suffer, even for his own misdeeds, your Viola could not be happy."

"Pardon me, if I doubt he is your father," returned Harley; "for no father could so misuse a child as he has you, my own fair flower;" and throwing an arm around her slender waist, he drew her fondly to him.

"But you will forgive and forget all for my sake, dear Morton, and try to liberate him, will you not?" and again the soft pleading eyes of Viola spoke more than her lips.

"Were I certain of his being a prisoner within this tower, as you seem to think he is, dearest, I would do much for your sake; but I tell you frankly, I would neither risk my own life, nor yours, to set him free. And why should I? Do I owe him any gratitude for the misery he has made you and I suffer? Oh, Viola! Viola! you know not, you can never know, the anguish, the tortures, I have endured since the hour we first met on the bank of that romantic stream in old Virginia. When I look back over the intervening time, it seems as if I could number a thousand years of grief and agony, with only here and there a day of happiness. And who caused me all this suffering?

—who but the man you term your father, whom you would now have me peril my life to rescue from a just punishment! But come, dearest, we must talk of this elsewhere —for now my only care is to get you safely, if not secretly, away from here, before the Count returns."

"Oh, Heavens! we are lost! we are lost!" now cried Anne, in a tone of the utmost alarm, clasping her hands wildly.

She was standing by the southern window, looking out upon the park, over the front building.

"What is it?" cried Harley and I in a breath, springing to her.

"The Count! the Count! See! he has returned," she almost shrieked.

It needed but a single glance toward the left hand gate, to convince us she spoke the truth—for there, sure enough, coming leisurely up the avenue, was the very same horseman we had seen ride away an hour or two since. The next moment he spurred his gallant animal; and the roof of the building before us soon shut him from our view, as he drew near and nearer to the mansion.

Harley now turned to me, and I to him, and we read in each other's looks, the stern resolve of men who were determined to face the worst with unflinching firmness.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NOBLE PRISONER.

"Well, Harry, what are we to do?" said Harley, who was the first to speak.

"Fly! fly!—oh! fly, and save yourselves!" cried Viola, springing to us.

"And leave you in the hands of a villain, dearest?" replied Harley, throwing an arm around her and drawing her to him. "We should be cowards indeed to do that, my pretty flower!"

"But he will kill you, if you stay here, Morton! Oh, fly! fly! for my sake!"

"You forget, my dear Viola, we could not escape—for this terrible lord is already here."

"But you came as peddlers, you tell me—depart as such, and he will not molest you. This lady, I am sure, will keep the secret, for her own sake;" and she appealed to Anne with her eyes.

"Yes, yes—I will—I swear it!" cried Anne, in alarm. "Oh! gentlemen, go! go!—do as this lady bids you, and all may yet be well."

"What do you think of their advice, Harry?" inquired Harley, looking at me.

"That it is meant for our good, perhaps, but should not be followed," I replied.

He grasped my hand.

"Were there twenty terrible lords, instead of one, I would not stir an inch," he said.

"Nor I," I rejoined.

"You see," he continued, turning to Viola, "we are not to be moved—so spare us your entreaties, and be firm, and we will save you, or perish in the attempt. Here, seat yourself here, dearest, on this sofa, and do not stir from here, nor speak. Will this Count seek to enter the tower?" he continued, addressing Anne, who stood wringing her hands, the picture of despair.

"Doubtless he will," she answered, in tremulous tones. "Oh, go! gentlemen—go!—in mercy to yourselves, and us, go!"

"Hush! not a word. If I had a rope!"

"I saw one in the room above," I hastened to say.

"Ah, ha, ha! Fate again! Quick, Harry, and get it! there is no time to lose."

I bounded away, and in less than a minute returned with a good-sized coil.

"Now, Harry—and you, Anne—follow me to the room below."

"Oh! sir, I—" began Anne, drawing back.

"Girl!" cried Harley, interrupting her, seizing her by the wrist, and producing a revolver: "this is no time to trifle. You have sworn to obey us, and you *shall*! or take the consequences! We are armed, and desperate—*come!*" and he dragged her toward the door by main force.

"Kill me!" she cried—"kill me! I deserve death, for my unintentional treachery to my lord."

"Would you save his life?" demanded Harley, fiercely.

"Yes! yes! even at the sacrifice of my own."

"Then follow us, and give no alarm! or, I swear to you, I will send the first ball through his head!"

"Oh! then," pleaded Anne, "bind me! bind me! that he may think me overpowered, not treacherous."

"If we have time, I will. Come! quick! quick!"

We all now hurried down to the chamber below, but none more eagerly than Anne.

"There is time!" she cried; "quick now, with your cord!—and oh! for Heaven's sake, good gentlemen, do not harm him!"

It was the work of less than a minute to bind fast the hands and feet of Mistress Anne, who aided us all she could; and leaving her lying upon the ground, we hastened to the window that commanded a view of the bridge.

"Now, then, if he would only enter by the door here," began Harley; but interrupted his speech with the exclamation, "Ha! he comes! Quick! Harry—here! stand by me, ready to spring upon him!" and hurriedly unlocking the door, he placed himself, so that while open it would cover him, and I hastily took my position beside him.

Scarcely had I done so, when the door was thrown quickly open, and a voice, which we instantly recognized, exclaimed, angrily:

"Where are these thieving—"

The sentence was cut short by a heavy blow from the fist of Harley, which staggered the speaker forward, and brought him to his knees; and before he could recover himself, we were upon him; and, working like men whose lives depended on their exertions, we had him fast bound almost in the time it has taken me to record the fact.

On finding himself a prisoner, in his own strong-hold, the rage of the Count knew no bounds. His pale face grew livid with passion—his eyes shot gleams like fire—he ground his teeth, and foamed, and rolled, and worked himself in his cords like a giant and poured forth a volley of oaths in French, that I would not repeat even had they been spoken in my mother tongue.

Harley, after relocking the door, that we might have no

more to contend with, coolly took a seat along side of his prisoner, and quietly waited till the first burst of fury was over. It lasted much longer, however, than one would have thought likely—denoting the Count to be a man of the most ungovernable passions, who was now under physical restraint, with his mental powers terribly active, perhaps for the first time in his life. It was really painful to witness the workings of the demon within him; and I believe that, for a time, he was as much insane as ever was a chained inmate of Bedlam. Oh! such writhing—such gnashing of teeth—such rolling of the eyes, and such contortions of the countenance—I hope never to witness again! Truly had Anne said, he was terrible in his anger; and I verily believe, had it been in his power, he would have put us beyond the pale of mortality, with as little compunction as he would have felt for a serpent or a mad dog.

Gradually, at length, he grew calmer, and finally ceased his struggles altogether, fixing his keen, black eyes upon Harley, with a malignant intensity that seemed to penetrate to the very soul. He was, as I have previously described him, a finely formed man, of medium size, and some five-and-thirty years of age. He was, setting passion aside, by no means an ill-looking individual—though his features generally were too sharp and pale for any great manly beauty. His lips were thin and close, and on the upper one was a fine, black mustache, that contrasted forcibly with his pale countenance—the more so, that all the rest of his beard was kept closely shaved. His forehead was high, broad, and intellectual; and he had a look of firmness, decision, and command, that accorded with his real character. His most remarkable feature, however, was his eye; it was the blackest and most piercing I had ever beheld; and as I noted its fiery, snake-like appearance, I

did not wonder he could make himself feared by those over whom he could exercise authority in any degree, or by those whom fortune had placed within the limits of his evil influence.

Harley fixed his eye upon the Count, and, by the thoughtful earnestness of his look, I knew he was seeking to read the character of his enemy, that he might the more readily accomplish the purpose he had in view. For some time neither spoke; but silently regarded each other, like two combatants who have only ceased hostilities that they may the more readily close in the death-gripe.

My friend was the first to break the silence; and his language was altogether different from what I had anticipated, considering the occasion, and the recent exciting events.

"Well, Monsieur le Capitaine," he said, with a quiet smile, "if I were in your place, and you in mine, I think I would give it up as an unforeseen disaster, and endeavor to effect a compromise—of course making it as favorable to myself as I could under the circumstances—but at the same time resolving to yield some knotty points, with a very good show of grace—more especially if convinced, by certain demonstrations of my adversary, that I must yield them, *nolens volens*. What say you to this, good my lord?"

"Who are you?" demanded the Count, with an air of surprise.

"Why, I am what you can hardly have the pretence to be, my lord—an honest man."

The Count writhed, and his black eyes flashed.

"Villain!" he muttered through his shut teeth—"if I were only free of these cords, I would teach you how to address yourself to me."

"Why, there it is again, good my lord," returned Harley, smiling; "*if* you were free, of course; but you are not,

you see, and you are not likely to be at present—therefore I think we had better come to an amicable understanding. Now if *if* is to be the word, why, I can but repeat, that *if* I were in your place, and you in mine—you understand?"

"Who are you?" cried the other, fiercely; "and what do you seek here?"

"There now, the last is quite a sensible question, all things considered, and I may as well answer it. In the first place, I seek the liberation of Viola St. Auburn; in the second place, I wish to know what you have done with her worthy father? in the third place, I would ask you, if you think counterfeiting an honest and profitable speculation?"

At these last words the Count turned deadly pale, and for the first time exhibited signs of alarm.

"I do not understand your allusions to counterfeiting," he replied, with ashy, quivering lips.

"No? then if you will follow me to a certain small apartment above us, I will explain it to you in an unmistakable way."

"Ha! I have been betrayed!" groaned the other, setting his teeth hard.

"You are known, at all events," replied Harley, coolly; "and since you are completely in our power, I would advise you to make a virtue of necessity, and concede us all we ask."

"Oh! my lord, I did not betray you!" now cried Anne, in a tone of despair.

"Ha! you here?" cried the Count, working himself in his cords, till he brought his eyes to bear upon her—for not having seen her on his entrance, this was the first intimation he had of her being in the chamber.

"Oh! my lord," she exclaimed, "I did not betray you! —indeed, indeed I did not!—these villains—"

"Hold!" interrupted Harley; "I will permit no such language. Do not speak again, Mistress Anne, till I address you, or you will be sorry for it."

Anne was dumb, through fear that all might be revealed to him she both loved and feared.

"And now," pursued Harley, turning to the Count, with a stern look, "as time is precious to myself and friends, if not to you, let us come to an understanding at once."

"Who are you, sir?" again demanded D'Estang.

"Well, thinking it not unlikely you have heard of me before, I will honor you with my name. I am called Morton Harley."

"Ha!" ejaculated the Count, with anything but a pleasing expression; and he bit his nether lip till the blood showed through.

"Now that you know who I am, and probably divine my business here, let us see if we can come to any understanding," pursued Harley.

"Well, name your demands!"

"I will, Monsieur; and endeavor not to be unreasonable, considering the advantage I have over you."

"You are a coward," sneered the Count, "to make your boast over a gentleman in fetters! Set me free, sir, and see who gets the advantage then!"

"Ay, ay—or shoot myself through the head," returned Harley, ironically—"I suppose that would answer equally as well. But as I intend to do neither, Monsieur le Capitaine, suppose we come to the point at once. I may as well remark, *en passant*, that, having the advantage, I intend to make good use of it; and as to the epithet of coward—why, should it ever be my misfortune to be reduced to the level of your lordship, I will leave it to a gang of counterfeiters and thieves to decide which is the most cowardly, to kidnap an unprotected lady, with the assistance of her

own father, and shut her up in a tower—or to go boldly into the fortress of an enemy, make him a prisoner, and set the aforesaid lady at liberty, in defiance of his power. Now, Monsieur D'Estang, lest you should mistake my character, from my free and easy way of speaking, let me impress upon your mind, that I am not a person to be trifled with—that I value life only for the *use* I can make of it—that I fear death as little as yourself, perhaps less—and that once determined upon a course, I cannot be changed. And I would furthermore observe in this connection, that it is very fortunate for you that Viola St. Auburn has sustained no further injury than irksome imprisonment—for had it been otherwise—had you, in short, laid a rude hand upon her—I swear to you, Count D'Estang, I would have pitched you headlong from the top of this tower, though I died for it the next minute! Now, then, do you begin to understand me? Eh?"

"Go on, sir—I am in your power at present—but—"

"There, there, Monsieur," interrupted Harley—"that will do—never mind the rest. You are in our power for the present; exactly so; that will do for the present; and of the future we know just as much as yourself. Well, now to be brief, I wish you to state, in the first place, what has become of the father of Viola?"

"Well, sir, suppose I refuse to do so?"

"Then you will leave the impression on our minds that he has been foully dealt with—or, in plainer language, *murdered!*"

"Well?" said the Count, making an effort to appear calm and indifferent.

"Well," replied Harley, "in that case, though he was my enemy, I shall take every means in my power to have you brought to justice."

"But suppose I tell you he is imprisoned?"

"Then you must inform us how he can be liberated."

"Well, let us understand each other," pursued the Count. "Suppose I comply with all your demands—what am I to get in return?"

"Your liberty."

"When? and in what manner?"

"You shall be set free after we are gone. This, Sir Count, is much better than you deserve; but as it would be rather troublesome to bring you to justice, and remain as a witness myself, if you will comply with all our demands, and take a solemn oath not to seek to molest us after we are gone, you shall be restored to liberty."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will be kept here a prisoner; and one of us, at least, shall remain as your jailor."

"But I cannot long remain a prisoner here—for my servants, if no others, when once they learn the outrage that has been perpetrated upon me, will break in, overpower you, and set me free."

"But we will take care, my dear sir, that your servants learn nothing of the kind," said Harley.

"You cannot keep the knowledge from them; they will suspect there is something wrong, if I do not make my appearance in the course of the day."

"Then to settle the matter in a few words," returned Harley, producing his revolver, "let me assure you, M. D'Estang, that we are armed to the teeth—that the first that enters will be shot down like a dog—and that the moment we have reason to think we may be overpowered, that moment a ball shall be lodged in your lordship's brain!"

The Count bit his lip again, and seemed to reflect.

"Well," he said at length, "I like your candor, at all events: now say what you require of me?"

"First, that Mr. St. Auburn, if imprisoned, shall be set at liberty: secondly, that you shall suffer yourself to take his place till after our departure: thirdly, that you will give written orders to your servants to furnish us with four good horses, and permit us to leave your grounds unmolested: and fourthly, that you will swear, by all you hold sacred, never again to molest us."

Again the Count reflected; but he evidently saw no better way of getting out of a bad predicament; while the idea probably occurred to him, that by assenting to Harley's proposals, something might happen to give him the ascendency: he therefore rejoined:

"Well, sir, as I cannot do better, I concede your demands,—but first tell me in what manner I shall gain my liberty?"

"After we have been gone a reasonable time," replied Harley, "I will despatch a note to one of your porters, informing him of your confinement."

"But what security have I that you will not play me false?"

"The word of a gentleman."

"Well," sneered the Count, "that may do very well in some cases; but even you, sir, must admit, it is not *tangible* security."

"It is all I have to offer," returned Harley, haughtily; "and if you do not choose to accept of it—why, we will endeavor to manage the business without your assistance."

"Nay, my friend—"

"Hold!" cried Harley, almost fiercely; "do not presume, sir, to apply the term of friend to me — I detest such hypocrisy! I am your enemy, henceforth and forever, and will trouble you to bear it in mind."

The pale features of the Count flushed, his eyes flashed,

he bit his lips, and would doubtless have burst forth in a torrent of invectives, had not policy kept him silent.

"Do you agree to my conditions?" demanded Harley, at length; "yes or no?"

"Yes," replied the Count.

"Very well—let us proceed directly to business. First in order are the written directions to your servants."

"Yes, if you will permit me to send for pen, ink, and paper."

"It is unnecessary, sir, even if the articles were not to be found in your cabinet of curiosities up stairs; for I have paper in my box, and a pencil will answer our purpose as well as a pen;" and going to his box, Harley produced a torn blank sheet.

"I must have the use of my arms," said the Count.

"One will do, sir; but first we will ascertain what other arms you have;" and Harley proceeded to search the Count—finding on his person a brace of pistols, and a "Bowie," which he took from him.

We then released the Count's right arm, and, placing him on a sofa, drew a table up to him, so that he could write without difficulty. He affected no hesitation; but taking the pencil of my friend, wrote some three or four lines in French, signed his name at the bottom, and handed the paper to Harley. The moment the latter glanced over it, a dark, malignant expression, such as I had never before seen him exhibit, swept over his countenance; and slowly producing one of the Count's pistols, he pointed it at the head of his lordship, and said, in a deep, severe tone:

"Villain! I have a mind to make this treachery your last!"

Anne uttered a scream of terror.

"Hold! Morton!" I cried, in a tone of alarm; while the Count fairly turned livid with fear, and, with his eyes sink-

ing under Harley's fierce gaze, trembled in every limb: "Hold! Morton!—for the love of Heaven do no murder here!" I continued, taking the weapon from his hands, though he still kept his eyes fixed piercingly on the Count. "What has he done, Morton? Speak! what has he done?" and I repeated the question several times before I got an answer.

"Done?" cried Harley, at length, fiercely,—"read for yourself, Harry?" and he held forth the paper. "But I forgot," he added—"you do not understand French—so I will translate it."

And he read:

"*I am a prisoner in the tower; secure the bearers of this; let no one leave the Ville, on pain of death, and come instantly to my release.*

"D'ESTANG."

"He fancied, the knave! that neither of us understood French," added Harley.

I gave vent to my indignation in no very measured terms.

"He will rewrite the order," pursued Harley, sternly, again fixing his eyes piercingly on the Count; "and the very next time he attempts to play us false, will be the last. In English, Monsieur D'Estang!" he added, pushing the paper to him.

The Count again wrote; but, in spite of himself, his hand trembled. The second note, after perusing, Harley handed to me. It read:

"*Let the bearers of this, my particular friends, be provided with four good horses, and be permitted to leave the Ville without question or hindrance.* D'ESTANG."

"That will do, I think," I said.

"Now, then," said Harley, "for Mr. St. Auburn. Where is he, Sir Count?"

"He is imprisoned in this tower, below us," replied D'Estang.

"You must show us the way, sir."

The Count looked down at his limbs.

"We will refasten your arms, and release your legs," pursued Harley. "I can do this, Harry—will you favor me by calling Viola?"

I hastened to the chamber above.

"Well?" cried the beautiful maiden, eagerly. "Oh! Mr. Walton, I have been so terrified!"

"Be not so any longer then, fair lady," I replied—"for we have succeeded beyond our expectations."

"Is Morton safe?"

"Yes, and the Count a prisoner;" and I hurriedly narrated what had happened, adding; "Come, we are about to visit your father, and set you all free."

She wept for joy.

On reaching the lower chamber, Viola flew to Harley, threw her arms around his neck, and sobbed upon his breast.

"Cheer up, my love!" he said: "God is with us, and we triumph.—Come, dearest—we will free you, and your father, from the clutches of a demon incarnate; and then if he does not sanction our union, he is incapable of gratitude, and we must act without him."

As soon as Viola could subdue her emotions, so as to appear composed, Harley bade her follow with me; and then placing his hand on the Count's shoulder, who was now standing by, with his arms bound, but his legs unfettered, he said:

"Now, sir, show us the secret passage to your prisoner."

"But Anne," I interposed—"shall we leave her here?"

"Ah! I had nearly overlooked her! No, she must go with us."

I soon cut the cords that bound her feet; and then the Count, without a word, proceeded to the secret passage leading to the upper chamber, Harley keeping close to him, with a revolver in his hand.

"Here," said the count, on reaching the foot of the stairway; "underneath me is a trap door; and a little to the right, there, you will find a spring—press that, and it will open."

Harley stooped down, the count stepped aside, and in a moment the trap was raised, and a blast of cool air came up from the darkness below.

"We must have a light," said Harley.

I had seen a lantern in the little room above, and I hastened to get it. Harley took it, and after peering down into the darkness, swung it on his arm, fixed his left hand firmly in the cords that bound the count, and placing his revolver to the breast of the latter, said, in a determined tone:

"A single attempt at treachery, Count, and you are a dead man."

He then began to descend the steep, narrow stairs, keeping a firm hold of D'Estang—Viola followed next—and I brought up the rear with Anne.

So we went down to the dungeon of the tower.

CHAPTER XVII

A DISCLOSURE.

We descended two long, narrow flights of stairs, which brought us one story below the level of the earth. What the ground apartment of the tower contained, I do not know, for we did not enter it, but kept outside in the secret passage. At the foot of the second descent, we came to an iron door, which, on being opened by the Count's directions, admitted us to a small apartment, walled in with heavy stones, and paved with flags. An iron lamp was attached to the ceiling by a chain, so as to be lowered or raised. We lowered and lighted it, which enabled us to see very distinctly. Nothing particularly attracted our attention, save three iron doors, two of which were close together on the side opposite our entrance, and the other occupied a central position in the wall to the right. While looking around us, we heard something like a groan, though either distant, muffled, or feeble, we could not tell which.

"Come," said Harley, who still retained his hold upon the Count, "I suppose that sound proceeds from your victim—show us to him!"

"This way;" and the Count advanced to one of the two doors near together, while we all eagerly followed, Viola faintly murmuring;

"My father! my poor father!"

"The key hangs by the door," said the Count.

Harley found it, and soon had the door open, disclosing

a small crypt, with a grated door between us and the prisoner. The open space between the two doors had some connection with the chamber above, and was doubtless contrived to admit air to the tenant of the cell, for there appeared to be no other means of ventilation.

"Here, Harry," said Harley, "take charge of the Count, while I set free the prisoner."

I laid my hand on D'Estang, and Harley entered the crypt with his lantern. The grated door was secured by bolts, that could easily be removed from without. In less than a minute, I heard my friend say:

"Henry St. Auburn, you are free."

"What means this? to whom am I indebted for this liberation?" said a voice from within.

"Your daughter will explain all," replied Harley; "she is without here—come;" and the next moment Harley reappeared, followed by a man some forty-five or fifty years of age, with iron-gray hair, a rather robust frame, and strongly marked features.

I had only time to observe this much, when Viola, with a cry of "Father! dear, dear father!" sprang forward, threw her arms around his neck, and wept upon his breast.

"Will some one be so good as to explain the meaning of all this?" said St. Auburn, looking from one to the other, with an air of perplexity, but exhibiting less affection for his daughter than was consonant with my feelings.

"It means, dear father," replied Viola, looking up into his face, with her beautiful arms still clasped around his neck, "that the man you have thought your friend, has proved himself your enemy; and that the man you have considered your enemy, has proved himself your friend."

"I know who has proved himself my enemy," rejoined St. Auburn, looking fiercely at the Count, who stood pale

and silent, biting his lips; "but who is he that has proved himself my friend, in this hour of need?"

"Behold him!" said Viola, pointing to Harley, who, with his arms folded on his breast, stood near, calmly, but somewhat sternly, regarding St. Auburn.

"Sir, you are a stranger to me, but—" began St. Auburn, looking at Harley, who interrupted:

"Nay, sir, I am no stranger, but one too well known;" and with the words he removed his wig, mustache, and whiskers, adding: "You recognize me now, Mr. St. Auburn?"

"Ha! Harley!" cried St. Auburn, with a start, changing countenance.

"Yes, a despised Harley," returned my friend, with not a little asperity.

"I do not understand this," said St. Auburn, with an air of wonder.

"This way, father, I will explain all," returned Viola, quickly; and she drew St. Auburn aside, and spoke to him hurriedly, for a few minutes, in a low tone.

The Count regarded the two, while they were conversing apart, with a peculiar expression. His brows contracted, a sneer played around his mouth, and once or twice he seemed on the point of speaking, but withheld the utterance and remained silent.

At length St. Auburn advanced to Harley, and proffered his hand.

"Sir! Mr. Harley," he said, "I feel I have done you great injustice. My daughter—"

"Bah!" sneered D'Estang: "Speak the truth and shame the Father of Lies!—you know she is not your daughter."

"Not his daughter?" exclaimed Harley, catching at the word: "Not his daughter, Count D'Estang?"

"No! she is not his daughter."

"Silence!" interposed St. Auburn, fiercely.

"Nay, speak!" cried Harley, while we all stood breathless with surprise. "Speak! Count—you shall be heard. I know he has not treated her as a father should treat a daughter—but still I knew not that she is not his own flesh and blood."

"Look at the two—do you see any resemblance?" said D'Estang, with another sneer.

"But that goes for nothing, Count, unless you have other proof," replied Harley.

"Silence, villain!" cried St. Auburn, looking fiercely at the Count. "Dare to open your vile lips—"

"Hold!" interrupted Harley; "I am master here, and the Count *shall* have a hearing."

"Oh! what new and fearful mystery in this?" now cried Viola, looking from one to the other for explanation.

"She is not his daughter," persisted D'Estang, "and he knows it. The secret he made known to me for a consideration; but since I am foiled, he shall no longer have the advantage of it."

"Is this true, father? is this true?" cried Viola, addressing St. Auburn.

"Believe it not, Viola—it is an invention of his own," replied St. Auburn, not a little agitated.

"Look at his face, and be your own judges," rejoined D'Estang.

Harley now took Viola aside, and held a short conference with her; then he returned to the group, and she remained apart.

"This is all very strange, and I should like a clearing up of the mystery," he said, addressing the Count.

"And I can give it in a few words," replied D'Estang. "Henry St. Auburn had a daughter—"

"Mr. Harley," interrupted St. Auburn, "that he who

passes for Count D'Estang is a villain of the worst type, I think you have already had sufficient evidence; and if the tale of my disgrace must be told, let it come from my lips."

"Say on then!" returned Harley.

"Not here, Mr. Harley—not here. Set me at liberty, and I swear to you, you shall have the truth, and the benefit of the truth. D'Estang knows only what I have told him, and he has already abused my confidence. Since matters have gone so far, I may as well state, that she who is called Viola St. Auburn, is *not* my daughter, and that whoever weds her will wed an heiress of great wealth. This is the true reason why Monsieur D'Estang has sought to force her into an alliance with himself."

"To accomplish which vile measure, you scrupled not to lend your assistance," rejoined Harley.

"In part, Mr. Harley, I confess; but that I refused to second all his base plans, my imprisonment here is proof sufficient."

"Did you not force her to come hither, with no other motive than to marry her to D'Estang?"

"I persuaded her to come, in the hope that I could prevail upon her to give him her hand in marriage, though I was not then aware of his being such a villain," replied St. Auburn.

"As for villany, I fear there is not much to choose between you," replied Harley, sternly. "You, at least, I know of old; and it will require much at your hands, to cause me to overlook your treatment of my father, or your insults to me personally—more especially, since your own lips have informed me you are not the father of Viola."

"I trust, Mr. Harley," replied St. Auburn, with a penitent look, "you will not recall the past; and for the future—"

"He will be as great a villain as ever," chimed in D'Estang, interrupting him. "Put no faith in what he

says, Mr. Harley—for the penitence he now exhibits, proceeds from fear, not regret. He is a villain, without manhood—a base, paltry coward, who will fawn when he is in your power, and bite when you are in his."

On hearing this, St. Auburn raised his clenched hand, and aimed a blow at the Count, which I parried.

"Would you strike a defenceless man?" cried I, indignantly; "do you not see that D'Estang is bound?"

"Attempt the like again," said Harley, fiercely, grasping the arm of St. Auburn, "and you shall back to your dungeon."

"I crave pardon! I was rash," returned St. Auburn, cowering.

"You see!" said D'Estang—"I spoke the truth."

"Silence!" commanded Harley; "and let recrimination cease! And now, Mr. St. Auburn, speak the truth, and say for what reason you were imprisoned here."

"I was about to do so," replied the other. "It was because I would not consent to force Viola to wed this man," pointing to D'Estang. "Base as I am, I never intended to exercise over her any power beyond earnest entreaty. I told her she might choose between him and a convent; and I would have made my word good, and removed her ere this, had I not been decoyed to this dungeon, and thrust into that cell by force. I will not deny that my motive in bringing her here was so far base, that I was to receive a certain sum of money the moment she should become his bride; but when, after getting her here, I found how repugnant it was to her feelings to think of wedding such a man, even to be mistress of all he owns, I resolved to take her away at any sacrifice. The world has not gone well with me, Mr. Harley. Not long since I lost a fortune, and a wife that I prized above every thing earthly. Circumstances made me desperate. In an evil

hour I met Monsieur D'Estang, and the bargain and sale was consummated, in so much that it only required the consent of Viola to make the contract effective. That I acted right in doing as I have done, I do not pretend to say —but I am not more guilty than I have made appear."

"But why did you wish Viola to marry the Count in the first place?" inquired Harley.

"Because I then thought him a gentleman; and because, also, he pledged himself to pay me twenty thousand dollars on her wedding-day. I had a contract to this effect, which he has since taken from me."

"And when this contract was entered into, did he know that she is not your daughter?"

"Yes, I had previously told him the secret of her parentage."

"And who, sir, are my parents?" cried Viola, in no little agitation, she having drawn close to the speaker without being observed.

"I thank Heaven that St. Auburn is not one of them!" rejoined Harley. "But, dearest Viola, you were to remain apart," he continued, chidingly.

"But think you, Morton, I have no interest in this matter?"

"Great interest, my dear Viola; but I would have reported all to you."

"Nay, Morton, I pray you let me hear for myself."

Harley assented, and again addressed himself to St. Auburn.

"What motive had the Count for binding himself to give you so large a sum on the day that Viola should become his wife?"

"I have said that she is an heiress to great wealth," was the reply.

"Well, and if so, why did you *sell* her for such a sum?

Why did you not make known to her her history, and trust to her generosity to reward you?"

"To tell you the plain truth, Mr. Harley, I knew she was engaged to you; and I feared, if she became possessed of the secret of her birth, she would spurn my control, and place herself and fortune wholly in your hands."

"Ah! sir, (I cannot call you father, since you disown the tie of consanguinity,) how much you mistake my nature," returned Viola, her eyes filling with tears. "Had you made me a confidant instead of another, and consented to my wedding the man of my choice, I would have placed my fortune, whatever it may be, at your disposal."

"It is only another instance of villany overreaching itself," rejoined Harley, in a severe tone.

"But tell me, sir—oh! tell me who I am?" pursued Viola, with great emotion. "Oh! I am bewildered—I know not what to think, or how to act! And is it possible that she I so loved, and called by the endearing title of mother—is it possible she was no kin of mine? and could she have known this, and never have told me?"

"My poor Mary!" returned St. Auburn, not a little affected: "She was indeed no kin to you, Viola; but she knew it not; she believed to the last you were her daughter."

"Oh! this is a fearful mystery, sir!" continued Viola; "I pray you make it clear! Tell me—oh! sir, tell me—who are my parents? are they living? and how came I estranged from them? Perhaps—"

She paused—a wild troubled expression swept over her beautiful features—a cold shudder seemed to pass through her frame—and placing her hand upon her heart, as if to still its throbbings, she fairly gasped for breath.

"Viola! dear, dearest Viola!" cried Harley, springing to and supporting her with his arm; "what means this agitation?"

"You at least have nothing to blush for," said St. Auburn, who appeared to understand what she wished yet feared to know.

On hearing this, Viola drew a long breath of relief, and murmured:

"Thank Heaven! thank Heaven!"

"Come!" said Harley, gently drawing her aside again—"you must no longer be a listener, Viola—the subject too deeply interests you. Leave all to me, dearest—leave all to me;" and after a few more words with her, he returned to St. Auburn, and said, in a low tone: "I beg, sir, that you will put me in possession of the facts of this business at once!"

"Not here," was the reply: "set me at liberty, and I will."

"But you may break your word, when you no longer have anything to gain by the disclosure. I might have known nothing now, only for the Count."

"You would in time, Mr. Harley; but I should have made my own terms for the secret."

"And what would have been your terms?"

"The same as agreed to by this treacherous Frenchman."

"It is a large sum, but I do not wish to take any undue advantage of you. *Prove* what you have asserted, and, I pledge you the honor of a gentleman, you shall have the amount named."

"Ah! sir," cried St. Auburn, rapturously, "you are a true gentleman, I see; I was mistaken in you; your hand, Mr. Harley."

"Pardon me!" returned my friend, drawing himself up with an air of reserve. "I am a little peculiar in some respects; and one of my peculiarities is, that I only give my hand where I can give my heart. This is merely a

business transaction, Mr. St. Auburn. There is not, there never can be, any friendship between us."

The countenance of St. Auburn fell; while the Count chimed in, with a curl of his thin lips:

"Ay, keep him at a safe distance, Mr. Harley."

"Well, free me from this hateful confinement," rejoined St. Auburn, quickly—"take me from the presence of my treacherous confederate here, (pointing to D'Estang, who only smiled scornfully,) and I will keep my word with you."

"I owe you this much," said Harley; "because, however vile your intentions were, you used no actual force with Viola. Were it otherwise, sir, you should now be punished according to your deserts."

"Give not to so vile a man the sum named," interposed D'Estang. "As to his secret, it is in my possession, Mr. Harley; and if you wish, you shall have it for the asking. I would at least do this much to revenge myself on him for his insults—since, at present, it is not in my power to do more."

"But he has not the proofs," said St. Auburn, eagerly; "and what is the secret without proof to support it? I can prove Viola to be what I assert—but—"

"And where are these proofs?" interrupted Harley.

"Not here, I assure you. No, I determined, for fear of treachery, to retain a hold upon the interest of D'Estang, till he should fulfil his part of the agreement."

"Bah! what matters proofs, when the secret is divulged?" sneered the Count.

"Hold!" said Harley. "To save further discussion of the matter, let me assure you both that I shall keep my word. If St. Auburn does what he says he will do, he shall have the amount named, whether the secret is divulged by another or not. I have pledged my honor to this, and I trust I am too much of a gentleman not to redeem it."

"You can do as you like," returned D'Estang, tartly, biting his lips.

"Thank you for the permission," rejoined my friend, drily. "And now, Monsieur le Capitaine, I will trouble you to tell me what the door next to this cell conceals?"

"Another cell like it."

"Very good; then there is one for you, and one for Mistress Anne here."

"Oh! sir, are you going to imprison me also?" cried Anne.

"Yes," replied Harley, abruptly; and going to the door in question, he took down the key which hung by it, and opened it. Then approaching Anne, he whispered something in her ear; and without a word, she followed him into the inner cell. "Be not alarmed," I heard him say to her; "your kind master will doubtless release you the moment he regains his own liberty;" and coming out, he locked the heavy iron door, and returned the key to its place. "And now," he added, addressing the Count, "your lordship will be so good as to take the place of your late prisoner. It is very unpleasant, I doubt not; but no frowns, good my lord, for it *must* be so."

The Count bit his lip; and as he turned to enter the dungeon, muttered something in a low tone.

"By-the-by," said Harley, tapping him on the shoulder, "I suppose that other door, yonder, opens into the secret passage under ground, by which you sometimes enter and leave this very agreeable abode?"

"Well?" said D'Estang, turning upon him quickly, his black eyes gleaming with suppressed rage.

"Oh, that is all," returned Harley, coolly. "If I had time, I should like to explore it, but shall put off that pleasure for the present. Be a little cautious, Monsieur le Capitaine, or I may take the liberty to return with a few

individuals who will be even more curious in looking over your Ville than I have been."

"But I thought," said the Count, turning pale, "that there was a certain agreement between us, that—"

"Oh, never fear, sir, but I will keep my word," interrupted Harley. "I am only giving you a little caution, lest you should break yours. Remember, you are not to seek to molest us;" and Harley fixed his eyes upon D'Estang with an expression that said more than his language. "That will do," he continued: "we understand each other, I think. Be kind enough to step in there now—for time passes, and we would be on the road without more delay."

Having secured the Count as it were in his own trap, locked both doors, and returned the key to its place, Harley approached St. Auburn, and said:

"Now, sir, as I am about to set you free, which is more than you deserve, and as it is very uncertain what may happen after you regain your liberty, I wish you to state who are the parents of Viola—where they can be found, if living—how she came to be brought up as your daughter—in short, say all you know concerning her, as also when and where I can have the proofs to which you have alluded."

"The story is long," replied St. Auburn, with some hesitation; "but I think I can satisfy you in a few words;" and drawing my friend aside, the two conversed together for a few minutes in a low tone.

My curiosity was excited to learn the secret also; but perceiving it was not intended for my ear as yet, I approached Viola, whom I found in tears.

"Oh! Mr. Walton, this mystery makes me very unhappy," she said.

I was saying what I could to console her, when Harley rejoined us. His countenance was bright and animated, and I knew by this he had heard good news.

"Pardon me, my friends," he said, taking each of us by the hand, "that I do not now make you my confidants. For a certain time I have promised secrecy in regard to what I have just heard; but should it prove true, I am the happiest of mortals. Cheer up, dear Viola! all, I trust, will yet be well; but whether true or false, my dear Viola, I can never be unhappy while we are together. Come, let us leave this place at once, ere any thing occurs to prevent."

And he forthwith led Viola up the stairs, St. Auburn and I following

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

On reaching the second story of the tower, Harley said if I would see to having the horses got ready, he would remain with Viola till my return. I first examined my weapons, and then went out across the drawbridge, he locking the door after me. In passing through the mansion, I met Pierre, and another servant, whom, from his livery, I supposed to be the Count's *valet de chambre.*

"I wish four of his lordship's best horses saddled for the road immediately, one for a lady to ride," I said, in a positive tone. "Come, why do you hesitate?" I continued, as both looked at me with an air of surprise.

"It is usual for my lord to give his own orders," replied the valet.

"And so he does now," I rejoined, handing him the note written by the Count.

He read it carefully through a couple of times, turned it over, examined every part, as if looking for some private mark, and then said:

"This appears to be correct—but—"

"Is it usual for you to hesitate, in this manner, to obey a command of his lordship?" interrupted I, sternly. "If so, perhaps I had better let his lordship know it;" and I turned as if to go back to him.

"Stay!" returned the valet, quickly, evidently convinced by my manner that all was right. "Stay! the horses shall be got ready instantly: do not report me to his lord-

ship,—I will hasten to give the groom orders;" and turning on his heel, he quickly disappeared.

"I will return to the bridge—let me know when the horses are ready," I said to Pierre; and I immediately stationed myself at the place mentioned, to prevent any one approaching the tower.

In about a quarter of an hour I heard the trampling of horses; and a few moments after the valet himself appeared to announce that the animals were ready.

As I turned to cross the bridge, he added:

"I will accompany you to my lord."

"No," said I, "he will see no one at present—he is in a private apartment."

"Ah! very well—then I will not intrude upon him. You may mention, if you see him, that the gentleman he expects, will be here to dinner."

"If I see him again, I will," I replied; and the valet went away, apparently satisfied.

Harley, who had watched my approach from the window, met me at the door.

"Well," he said, hurriedly and anxiously, "is all right?"

"So I think," I replied.

"The horses?"

"Are waiting their riders. But, my friend," I added, seriously, "I think there is no time to lose. I do not know that the servants are suspicious; but I do think that the sooner we get away the better."

"Ah! yes! yes! Here" he added in a whisper, nodding toward St. Auburn, "remain by the door here, and keep an eye on him. Viola is above—I will call her. All is ready. I have secured our most valuable jewelry about me—the boxes and the rest we will leave where they are."

Saying this, Harley quitted the chamber, and after an absence of two or three minutes, returned with Viola, who

had donned her bonnet, and a riding-habit which she chanced to have in one of her trunks. The latter, together with most of their contents, in reality quite valuable, she was forced to leave—but we thought not of such trifles at a moment when our very safety depended on a chain of fortunate events. When we were all ready to leave the tower—

"Now," said Harley, "we must appear to be in good spirits, lest the servants suspect something wrong. If they make any inquiries, leave me to answer them. Courage, dearest—courage! You must not tremble so! Drop your veil, and that will conceal your blanched cheeks and quivering lips. Take Harry's arm. There! are you ready?"

"One moment," said Viola, faintly, and a shudder passed through her frame. "There," she added, immediately after, "my nerves are still again: I am ready now."

As we left the tower, we paused a moment near the door, to give Harley an opportunity to lock it without being observed, for we were aware that several eyes were upon us. We entered the mansion, moved along the corridor, went down the stairs, and passed out of the hall, without other incident occurring than being met and escorted by Pierre and the valet. Harley seemed in glorious spirits—talking, laughing, and joking all the way—and I imitated his *nonchalance* as much as lay in my power. He had not resumed his disguise; and Pierre, I noticed, eyed him a little curiously; but, fortunately for us, the porter was not too sharp-sighted, and the other servants now beheld him for the first time.

We found four fine-spirited horses standing in front of the mansion, in charge of the groom, ready for mounting, and all the servants, even to the cook, gathered together, to see us depart.

"A beautiful day for a ride," observed my friend, carelessly. "By-the-bye, I did not ask his lordship his hour of dining?"

"It is three, sir, usually, when he has guests," replied the valet.

"Ah! yes—a very good hour. Well, tell his lordship that that time will suit us as well as any other, as it is not probable we shall return before two."

"Did his lordship send any message concerning the dinner?" inquired the valet.

"No, none—please yourselves—we are not particular about the fare."

"Could I not see him a moment?" again inquired the valet.

"No, you had better not disturb him for an hour or two; he is in privacy, and has some weighty matters under consideration."

The valet, who was a keen, shrewd fellow, did not, I fancied, appear altogether satisfied; but he said nothing more, and I thought it best not to seem to notice him. Harley now assisted Viola to mount; and then springing lightly upon the back of another animal, took his place beside her, and the two moved slowly down the avenue. St. Auburn and I also mounted, and followed at the same leisurely pace.

After proceeding a short distance, I looked back, and saw the servants collected in a group; they were evidently discussing the matter of his lordship not appearing to see us depart. So I thought, at least, and felt uneasy; and the moment we were hidden from them by the shrubbery, I communicated my idea to Harley, and advised him to quicken his pace. He did so; and in a few minutes we reached the gate, through which we had that morning entered D'Estang Ville as peddlers. The porter eyed us a

little curiously, I thought; but opened the gate, without asking any questions; and with an indescribable feeling of relief, we found ourselves once more upon the highway.

For a quarter of a mile or more, or until a bend of the road shut from us a view of D'Estang Ville, we rode along at a slow pace; and then putting our horses to a fast canter, we did not draw rein till we reached the inn of the village where Harley and I had passed the night.

Tom came running out as we rode up, and appeared as delighted to see me as if we had been separated four months, instead of four hours. In fact, the poor fellow wept tears of joy—for he had been much concerned lest something serious had happened to me.

We all dismounted, entered the inn, and had refreshments served to us in a private apartment. While eating, we held a sort of council of war, as to what course was best for us to pursue, to escape the revenge of the Count; for notwithstanding his oath not to molest us, we felt almost certain he would break it the moment it should be in his power to do so.

"It is very necessary," said Harley, "for more reasons than one, that we return to Galveston immediately—the only question is, in what way it shall be done. Shall we cross the country over the route by which we came hither? or shall we take a steamer down the Brazos, and so round by the Gulf?"

"The latter, by all means," said St. Auburn, quickly. "We might get safely through by land, and we might not."

"Why, what do you apprehend?" asked Harley.

'I have reason to think that the country between here and Galveston is infested with a gang of desperadoes, at the head of which is this same wicked D'Estang."

"Oh! by all means, let us return by water!" said Viola.

"Your wish is law, dearest," rejoined Harley, smiling: "by water let it be."

This settled, Harley, true to his promise, dispatched a messenger with the key of the tower and a note to the porter, with another enclosed for the Count himself, in which he thanked his lordship for his kindness and hospitality, and intimated that he would find his horses at a certain landing, subject to his order. We then rode briskly down to the landing in question, Tom keeping us company on foot. But here a sad disappointment awaited us. The only boat that was to go out that day, was disabled; and we must perforce remain over night, or ride across the country. We dared not think of remaining in such close proximity to a man that we feared would scruple not to employ the vilest means to revenge himself upon us—and that his power was great to employ such means, we had good reason for believing.

"How unfortunate," said Harley, "that I have sent to release the Count! for we might have kept him in durance till we reached a place of safety. But it cannot be helped now, and we must act while we have the power."

"How unfortunate indeed!" exclaimed Viola; "for somehow I have a presentiment that we shall meet with trouble."

"And I," said St. Auburn, gloomily.

"Fear not, dearest—but rely on us to protect you," said Harley, in reply to Viola. "We are four, counting Tom, and we are all well armed."

"But not invulnerable," rejoined Viola—"and oh! Morton, if anything should happen to you!"

"Do not be apprehensive, dearest—but put your trust in a higher Power—that Power which has aided us so far in all our difficulties. And now, Harry," he added, turn-

ing to me, "we must have a horse for Tom, and the sooner we are on the road the better."

We succeeded, after a little delay, in purchasing a swift-footed animal; and crossing the Brazos, we took the most direct route for Galveston, and dashed away at such speed as we thought our horses would bear without giving out.

I shall not weary the reader with a detail of our progress on that memorable day. Suffice it to say, that when the sun went down, not much more than half of our journey had been accomplished, and already our animals were beginning to show signs of fatigue, and we ourselves felt much in need of refreshment and rest. From where we now were, to the nearest village, was about six miles; and our road, none of the best, lay through a dense, dark wood, which was only broken in one or two places by a small clearing around the log-cabin of some late settler in this region. As if to increase the gloominess of our journey, a black, heavy cloud began to loom up in the west, from which issued flashes of lightning, followed by the rumbling sound of distant thunder, warning us that a shower was approaching, an event that was anything but agreeable in our situation.

"Come," said Harley, "unless we quicken our present speed, this storm will surely overtake us before we reach the village, the only place where I should like to trust myself to pass the night in this part of the country."

"Yes! yes!" returned St. Auburn, anxiously; "and I would we were far beyond that—for, from all I know and have heard, there are some desperate characters in this vicinity."

We accordingly spurred on our jaded horses, St. Auburn and I riding in advance, Harley and Viola coming next, and Tom bringing up the rear. We had advanced perhaps a mile furtner. when we found ourselves about central way

of a long strip of dense wood, and, save when relieved by the flashes of the storm behind us, in a darkness impenetrable to the eye. We could see nothing, in fact, except when it lightened; and then the bright flash so blinded us, that, for a short time after, the darkness appeared doubled. Nothing was said, for each was occupied with thoughts of our situation, and felt too deeply anxious for the result to give voice to them. Save that we were mounted, traveling over a known road, and had the evanescent light of the approaching storm to guide us, I felt our situation to be in every respect as gloomy as on the night when we sought the wayside inn.

"And perhaps," I thought to myself, "the peril is even greater; for our late proceedings must of course have made us a powerful enemy in the person of Count D'Estang, who is, if released, at this very moment doubtless pursuing us; and we now have one to protect, who can, in the event of an assault, render us no assistance whatever."

While such thoughts as these were yet passing through my mind, I was startled by hearing a monotonous, deadened sound behind us. I made no remark, but turned my head aside, and inclined it in a listening attitude. At this moment a bright flash lit up the wood, and revealed my position to Harley, who was riding near with Viola, and who instantly called out, in an anxious tone:

"What is it, Harry? what is it?"

I just caught a glimpse of his features, and saw that they were deadly pale.

"Perhaps it is nothing—but I thought—"

"Hark!" interrupted St. Auburn, reining in his horse.

We all came to a halt and listened.

The sound, whatever it was, drew nearer; and as it became more audible, I fancied I could distinguish the

patter of horses' feet. We waited breathlessly another minute, and all doubts were removed.

"We are pursued, I fear," said Harley, in a low, determined tone. "The sound draws nearer every moment—it is made by several horses. Let us ride into the wood here, and remain quiet—they may pass us. Courage! dearest—courage! we will protect you."

Viola replied in a tone too low for me to distinguish what she said, and at the same moment we all beheld each other by another flash of lightning. Harley, taking advantage of the light, pointed to the wood to the right, and exclaimed:

"This way—quick!" and the next moment I heard the sound of his horse's feet in that direction, and a rustling among the bushes.

We all instantly followed him, as best we could; and riding back a few rods from the road, we again came to a halt. The distant, rumbling sound, as first heard, had by this time become an unmistakable clatter of horses' hoofs, urged over the ground at no ordinary speed. They were now evidently at no great distance, and I at least was congratulating myself, that, if in pursuit of us, they would be likely to pass us in the darkness, and so give us time for further preparation, even if they found us at all, when the sounds began to grow less audible, and gradually to die away, till at last nothing but the sighing of the breeze among the trees, and the now loud and increasing thunder, broke the stillness of the forest.

"What can be the meaning of this?" said Harley, in a low tone.

"Perhaps there is another road, which we have passed in the darkness, and they have taken!" I suggested.

"You are right—there is another road—I remember it

now," rejoined St. Auburn; "and this convinces me that they are D'Estang's men."

"But why did they take that road, think you?" inquired Harley.

"It is a nearer way, I am told, across the country," replied the other; "and knowing that I am with you, they may have thought that we have taken it—or again, believing us to be further advanced on our journey, they may have done so with a view to heading us, or overtaking us sooner."

"And does the road you speak of come into this, between here and the village?"

"I think not, nor for several miles beyond."

"Then we will resume our journey," said Harley, "and hasten forward to this village, where we will, Heaven willing, spend the night."

We accordingly picked our way back to the road, and, urged forward by our fears and the approaching storm, set off with what speed we could. The cloud in the west had by this time loomed half way to the zenith, the lightning had become more frequent and vivid, and the thuuder now rolled heavily over our heads, occasionally with that crashing sound which tells that the fiery bolt has passed from heaven to earth, and rent some object at no great distance.

"Oh! what a gloomy journey!" said Viola; "and we shall soon be at the mercy of this storm, I fear."

"It will overtake us, I think," replied Harley; "but we can ride no faster, without endangering our safety. Courage! dearest—courage! I am with you, and we will brave the storm together. Or perhaps," I heard him add a moment after, "we can find some shelter on the way till the storm is past."

"No, no, Morton—do not let us trust ourselves among any of the settlers here—for I fear them more than the

storm. Oh! I have such a foreboding of evil—pray Heaven avert it!"

"Nerve yourself, dearest—give not way to your fears, and all may yet be well."

He said something more, which I did not overhear, and Viola apparently became quieted.

We rode on at a brisk trot, and had advanced a mile or two further, when the rain began to fall in large drops, and we could hear the roar of the storm sweeping up the forest behind us. At this moment, by the light of another vivid flash, I saw, or fancied I saw, the figure of a man standing beside the road, partly concealed by some bushes, not half-a-dozen paces distant. St. Auburn apparently beheld the same object—for he reigned his horse up to mine, laid his hand upon my arm, and was in the act of saying something, when I felt my bridle-rein rudely seized, a pistol flashed before me, and a ball, passing through my hat, slightly grazed the crown of my head.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ATTACK.

INSTANTLY all was confusion. I heard Viola scream, Harley shout, and voices all around me, many of them strange to my ears. I knew we were attacked by numbers, and that our only chance of escape lay in immediate and desperate action. Quick as thought, I drew my revolver, and bending over my horse's neck, I reached forward, till I felt it touch some object, and fired. A groan and an oath succeeded, the grasp upon my bridle-rein was released, and I once more had my steed at my own command.

I now heard Viola shriek for help in tones of despair, and at the same moment a flash of lightning showed me the positon of each party. Viola, in the grasp of two men, with masks on their faces, was in the act of being dragged from her horse; Tom, a little way behind, was dismounted, and had one of the assailants by the throat—but I felt confident, if unmolested by others, he would not come out second best; Harley, seated on his horse, had a revolver pointed at the breast of another mask, who seemed in the act of striking him with a long knife; and St. Auburn, a little in advance of me, was contending with a couple of assailants, with what chance of success I could not tell. It was a startling, awful picture, which was only seen for a moment, and was succeeded by impenetrable darkness, by reports of pistols, by groans, shrieks,

shouts, and horrid oaths, and by a crash of thunder that made the earth tremble under us.

My first care was for Viola—for she, poor girl! I felt most needed assistance; and instantly leaping from my horse, I hastened to the spot where I had seen her—for now I could see nothing. I ran against some object, and, putting out my hand, felt it to be a man.

"Who are you?" he cried.

These words, perhaps, were his last; for I knew by the voice he was none of our party; and pushing my revolver against his breast, I fired again. There was a deep groan, and I heard him fall. By the dim light of the discharge, I caught a glimpse of Viola, now close to me, on her feet, struggling in the grasp of another ruffian, who was doubtless endeavoring to drag her to one side of the road and into the bushes. She called loudly on my name and Harley's for assistance. I threw the hand which held the revolver around her slender form, and as the weapon came in contact with some other object, I again pulled the trigger.

There was a yell of pain, and the next moment I felt her released, and reclining heavily against my breast. I thought it likely she had fainted, but could not tell. Another vivid flash now lighted for an instant the scene of strife, and by it I saw Harley still seated on his horse, pale and bloody, and looking wildly around him. He was only a few paces distant; and lifting Viola from the ground, I ran to him.

"Morton!" I cried,—"Morton! are you safe?"

"God be praised!" he ejaculated—"it is the voice of Harry. But Viola?"

"Here! here! quick! take her!—and ride! away! away!" and while speaking, I lifted her senseless form upon the horse and into his arms.

"My poor Viola! Heavens! she is not dead, Harry?"

"No, only fainted," I said at random—for in truth I knew not but that the ruffians had killed her. "Away! away! escape while you have an opportunity."

"But you—"

"Away!" I interrupted, with a shout of frenzy: "mind me not! away!" and I struck the horse a heavy blow with my weapon.

The animal leaped forward, and was gone—for I could hear the sound of his hoofs growing distant in the darkness. All I have mentioned had been the work of a few moments; but the storm was now roaring and howling around us, and the rain was falling in torrents. With a silent prayer for the safety of my friend and Viola, I turned to grope my way to the assistance of Tom, when I felt a rough grasp upon my shoulder, and a sharp pain in my right thigh, while a hoarse voice sounded in my ear:

"Take that, you villain! and that!" and I felt myself wounded in the arm, and the warm blood trickling down my leg.

I sprang backward, and my heel striking something in the road, I fell; and my opponent, still keeping his hold upon me, was brought down with me. In the fall I lost my revolver; and as my adversary did not immediately stab me again, I conjectured he had also dropped his knife. This gave me a gleam of hope; and grasping him by the throat, I exerted all my remaining strength to turn him, and get him under. But I labored in vain; for he was a powerful man, and being already fairly upon me, he had by position much the advantage. I now bethought me of my own knife; and letting go my grasp upon him, I endeavored to thrust my hand under my waistcoat and draw it forth; but the moment I released his throat, he clutched

mine with both hands, and, bearing down with all his weight. choked me till my eyes appeared to be starting from their sockets. I now felt myself to be in the agonies of death; and with my strength fast going from me, I said a mental prayer, "God have mercy on my soul!" and gave myself up for lost. At this critical instant, I thought I saw something like a flash, and heard something like a crash of thunder; but my senses were so confused and wandering, that I was certain of nothing save that I was in a dying condition. I think from this point of time I must have lost consciousness for a few moments; for the next thing I remember, my head was being raised from the wet clay, and I heard a familiar voice crying:

"Oh! Massa Hal, is ye dead? Oh! Massa Hal, is ye dead? Oh! oh! oh! my poor Massa Hal?"

"Is it you, Tom?" I said, faintly.

"Oh, bress God! you 'libe! Oh, tank God! my poor killed massa 'libe!" cried the poor fellow, with a choking sob of grief and joy; and lifting me from the earth, as if I were a child, he bore me quickly into the wood, and sat me carefully down about a hundred yards from the road, adding, in a low, excited tone: "Speak 'gin, Massa Hal—quick—dat dis child know you 'libe!"

"Yes, Tom," I said, "I am still alive, thank God! But I feel strangely, and very weak and faint."

"Oh! my poor massa, mebby you die 'gin now, in all dis rain!" sobbed the noble fellow; and almost tearing off his coat, he threw it around my shoulders, as the only protection he could give me against the beating storm, which was now raging at its height.

For a few minutes I sat and pondered; while Tom, on his knees by my side, sobbed aloud his grief; for he was now under the impression that I would die, and he knew his inability to do anything for me. At first my mind was

so confused and bewildered, that I could recall nothing distinctly. I knew that we had been assailed, and that there had been some kind of a skirmish—but all the particular incidents of that skirmish I had forgotten. Gradually, one by one, they came to me; and I remembered, with tears of joy, how I had rescued Viola, and placed her in the arms of my friend, and how they had ridden away; and if ever in my life I uttered a sincere prayer, it was that they might be permitted to escape unharmed.

"Tom!" I said, at length, and the poor fellow uttered a cry of joy.

"Dat like you'seff, Massa Hal," he said: "You no die dis time, I tink, bress Heaven!"

"No, my worthy fellow, I feel my strength returning, and I must thank you for my life;" and I grasped his honest hand, while he wept anew for joy. "But tell me, Tom, how did you come out in the affray? and how happened it that you so timely rescued me from an awful fate?"

"I can't tell much trait trufh, case I don't much know how um was," replied Tom. "Some rascal grab me, and I git from my hoss and grab him; and den I git out my r'olver, and do just Massa Harley tole me; and bang it go, and away he go, hollering. Den I look all around, but see not'ing, case um so dark. Bym-by um lighten; and den I tink I seed you, wid Missee Veeler, and I gwine to go to you; and den I seed not'ing 'gin, till bym-by um lighten 'gin; and den I tink I seed you on de ground, and big villain top; den I run up and feel in dark, and git hold on him, and put r'olver 'gin he head, and pull de little ting 'gin, and he let go; and den I git you up, and you speak, and I take you here, and dat all I know 'bout um, massa."

"You saved my life, Tom, and I am not one to forget it," I rejoined. "But now what is to be done? It is not

prudent to return to the scene of strife for our horses, and so we must try and reach the village on foot."

"I tink so, massa—bu-bu-but can you go 'foot you'seff?"

"I will try, with your assistance, Tom."

I did try, but at first found myself too weak to succeed. I had been wounded in the arm and thigh; and though only flesh wounds, the blood was still flowing freely. I sat down again, and ripping up the leg of my trowsers, and the sleeve of my coat, succeeded, with the aid of Tom, in putting a bandage round each, which in a great measure stanched the blood; but it was at least an hour before I found myself able to walk, even by leaning on Tom for support.

The storm meantime had raged with unabated fury. The wind blew a hurricane, bending the largest trees like withes —in some cases uprooting them, or twisting them from their trunks—while the rain fell in torrents, the lightning came like broad sheets of fire, that left a sulphurous smell and a sense of burning, and the thunder crashed and roared with a deafening effect. At last the storm began to abate, or at least to pass onward; and leaning on Tom for support, I set off slowly for the village, now about three miles distant.

We entered the road some quarter of a mile beyond the place of skirmish, but found it in a wretched condition. The ground was low and level, and the soil a moist clay, which the late rain had converted into a substance more resembling paste than any thing else I can liken it to; and as the foot went down with ease, in many places about knee deep, and came up with much labor, the reader can form some idea of the length those three miles appeared to me, in my weak, wounded, fatigued, and excited state.

We had progressed about half a mile, when we heard horses approaching us from the direction of the village.

Not knowing whether they were friends or enemies, we turned aside into the wood till they had passed, and then resumed our journey. So slowly did we travel, that it was a good hour and a half, after first reaching the road, ere we came in sight of the lights of the village. We were now startled again by hearing a body of horsemen behind us. We drew aside, and they passed us, talking earnestly, but in tones so low that I could not overhear what was said.

Half-an-hour later, completely worn out, I dragged myself up to the door of a very genteel looking inn of the village in question. There appeared to be something unusual going on within; for the bar-room was crowded, several horses stood hitched around the door, and I could see persons standing in groups, and all talking earnestly.

The moment we entered, all eyes were turned upon us, and some voice exclaimed:

"Here they are now;" and then a genteel-looking young man, in a kind of military undress, approached me, and said:

"Do I address Mr. Henry Walton?"

"That is my name, sir," I replied.

"Quick, some one," he said, turning to the others—"hasten and inform the young gentleman, Mr. Harley, that his friend has arrived."

"Harley?" cried I: "then he is safe?"

"Yes."

"And Viola?"

"If you mean the young lady who is with him, she is also safe."

"Thank God! thank God!" I ejaculated, sinking upon a chair; for I was nearly overcome with fatigue, loss of blood, and emotions of joy.

"They are now with another of your party, who has

just been brought in, badly wounded," continued the young officer, for such he really was.

"Ah! St. Auburn!" I said.

"Yes, I think that is the name."

"Is he dangerously wounded?" I inquired, with a degree of interest the reader will readily understand.

"Mortally, it is thought," replied my informant: "in fact, we picked him up for dead—but he still lives."

"It was your party, perhaps, then, that met and passed me on the road?"

"We have been only a short time returned from the spot where you were assailed by the robbers," answered the other.

I now heard the voice of Harley, fairly shouting:

"Where is he? where is he?" and the next moment, as the crowd near me gave way, he came bounding through, and throwing his arms around my neck, sobbed forth: "God be praised! God be praised! But you are pale and bloody!" he cried, starting back. "Heavens! you are wounded! you are ill besides! Quick, here, some brandy! and call the surgeon, somebody!"

"Do not be alarmed, Morton," I said: "my wounds are mere scratches. If these kind friends will stand back a little, and give me air, I shall do very well."

"But how did you get here, Harry? We could not find you, nor Tom, and thought the ruffians had dragged you away, and murdered you. Oh, Heaven! what were my feelings then! But, God be praised! you are here now, and I have you once more;" and again throwing his arms around my neck, he wept tears of joy.

But not to prolong my story with unnecessary detail, I will state in a few words all that is of any importance to the reader. Harley had succeeded in reaching the village with Viola, who on the way had recovered her senses, to

find herself in the arms of him she loved. In the affray, he had received a cut across the forehead, which accounted for his face being bloody at the moment I beheld it by the lightning; but as the wound was not serious, he had no sooner deposited Viola in safety at the inn, than he told his story, and asked assistance to go to the rescue of his friends. A recruiting officer, who chanced to be passing the night at the village, with a small party of his men, gallantly volunteered his services; and, with some ten or fifteen recruits, repaired to the scene of the attack, Harley acting as guide. They carried with them a couple of torches, which, on reaching the place of strife, they lighted, and made a careful search for the dead and wounded—expecting, as Harley told me, with tears in his eyes, to find Tom and myself among the number. But save the body of St. Auburn, they found very little indication of the sanguinary fight which had so recently taken place there. The desperadoes were all gone, and the storm had obliterated nearly all traces of their ever having been there. St. Auburn was discovered lying with his face to the ground, and was picked up in a senseless condition, with two deep wounds in his breast, and several cuts and stabs on other parts of his person. It was supposed at the time that he was dead; but on their way back to the village, he had exhibited signs of life; and on reaching the inn, he had been laid upon a bed, and a physician summoned to dress his wounds. The latter was now with him; but had given it as his opinion, that the wounds were mortal, and that the probability was he would not survive the night. As yet he had not spoken; but at the moment of my arrival, there were slight indications of returning consciousness; and Harley was in hopes he might, ere the fatal moment, be able to glean some further important knowledge concerning Viola.

Such was the substance of what my friend communicated to me, as I rested myself for a few minutes in the bar room, and drank off some kind of a cordial which the land lord meantime prepared for me.

"Do you think we were attacked by D'Estang's men?" I inquired, in a low tone, when Harley had finished his story, and I had given him some particulars of my own providential escape.

"I do," he replied, compressing his lips and frowning.

"Then let us make this country too hot to hold him, the perjured villain!" returned I.

"Not now, Harry—not now—you forget I have Viola to protect! I must first get her out of a country where she is not safe an hour; and then—But further is an after consideration. Come, let me conduct you to a private apartment, and have your wounds dressed at once."

"No," returned I, "since drinking this cordial I feel much revived, and I am anxious to see St. Auburn ere all is over."

"Well, at least you shall change your wet garments for dry ones," rejoined Harley.

"I did so, the landlord supplying me with the necessary articles. Meantime, Harley repaired to the apartment of the wounded man; but ere I was ready to do so, he burst into the room where I was, exclaiming:

"Quick! Harry—hasten! there are strong signs of returning consciousness, which the doctor thinks will precede speedy dissolution, and I would have you present, in case he makes any further revelation concerning Viola."

I hurried on my clothes, and accompanied my friend to the chamber of the dying St. Auburn.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

I FOUND him stretched upon a bed, breathing heavily, and slightly moving his head from side to side. His face was pale and ghastly, and he was much sunken about the eyes, cheeks, and mouth. On one side stood the surgeon, with his hand upon his pulse; and on the opposite side stood Viola, weeping. There were several other persons in the room, and among them a minister of the Gospel, who had called in to see the sufferer, and perchance to speak words of holy hope in his last moments. On seeing me, Viola at once came forward, and taking my hand, said, earnestly, with tearful eyes:

"God bless you, Mr. Walton! I owe my life to you, and more. This is a sad scene; for though I have been wrongly dealt with by him who now lies dying, yet I cannot forget I have ever called him father; and from my heart I forgive him—may Heaven do likewise."

It was indeed a sad scene, and all present were more or less affected. For some minutes St. Auburn remained as I have described him; and then opening his eyes, and looking around, said, in a feeble tone:

"Water—give me water."

These were the first intelligible sounds that had issued from his lips since being brought hither. The doctor took a glass of water, poured in a few drops of mixture from a vial, and gave him to drink. This seemed to revive him in a wonderful degree; and partly raising himself on his

elbow, and looking curiously around, he again spoke, in a stronger tone than before:

"Where am I? Ah! my breast—my head—let me think! Viola, my child, is that you? Ah! I seem to remember now: I was riding—we were trying to escape, and we were attacked. Yes, yes; and they were too much for us—for me at least—I think so—were they not?"

"You were badly wounded, father," said Viola, taking his hand.

"Father!" he repeated—"father! No, no—you must not call me father—I do not deserve the title. Oh, Viola, how deeply have I wronged you!"

"But I forgive you, father—for father I must still call you—and oh! pray Heaven to forgive you also!"

"I cannot pray—I never prayed in my life," he rejoined, with a look of anguish I shall never forget; "and if I did, God would not accept my petition at the last moment."

"It is never too late to repent in this life," interposed the divine, in a mild tone, approaching the bed. "Remember the thief on the cross!"

"And who are you that speak these words of consolation?" inquired St. Auburn, with a brightening of the countenance, as he fixed his eyes upon the minister.

"I profess to be an humble follower of Him who said to the thief, 'This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," was the reply.

St. Auburn extended him a hand, and then fell back on his pillow, apparently exhausted. He closed his eyes, and seemed to be pondering upon what he had just heard. Suddenly he looked up and said:

"Am I dying?"

"We fear you have not long to live," replied the surgeon.

"Are you a physician?" inquired the sufferer.

"I am."

"Then I ask you to tell me, honestly, whether there is or is not, a chance for me to recover?"

"You cannot recover."

A painful expression swept over St. Auburn's countenance, and he uttered a deep groan.

"Tell me," he continued, "and use no deception—how long can I survive?"

"The chances are that you will never behold the light of another sun."

"I am justly punished," rejoined the sufferer. And then, after another pause, he pursued, addressing the divine: "Is it not the first duty of a repentant man to right those he has wronged?"

"If you have wronged any one, and can repair the wrong, it is certainly your first duty to do so," was the reply.

"I have wronged many, sir, and it is beyond my power to right them; but there are those here present, who have had cause to curse my existence, that it may still be in my power to serve, for which I will hope for their forgiveness;" and his eyes now rested on Viola, and on Harley, who stood by her side.

"I forgive you all—everything," said Viola, in a tremulous tone; "and for my sake, if for no other consideration, I feel assured Morton will also;" and she appealed to him with her eyes.

"I do forgive you, Mr. St. Auburn," said Harley; "not alone for the sake of Viola, but because it is not in my nature to harbor malice against one who is doomed by the irrevocable decree of Fate to go hence to a speedy and final judgment."

"Thank you! thank you! Oh! you know not what a relief your generous words afford me! But my time is short, and I must do you and Viola the little service that

lies in my power. The secret of her parentage, God willing, I will now disclose. Something I have told you, if my memory serves me right—but there is much more to be told. Bear witness all," he continued, solemnly, rolling his eyes slowly over the bystanders: "Bear witness all of you, to the words of a dying man!—This young lady (extending his hand to Viola, who clasped it in both of hers) has ever been known as Viola St. Auburn, my daughter. But she is not akin to me, and has been most deeply wronged by me, as have her parents also, for which may Heaven forgive me! Bear witness all, that in the presence of Almighty God, before whom I must shortly appear, to render up a strict account of all the deeds done in the body, I solemnly pronounce her to be the daughter of Don Juan Gomez Alverda, a Spanish gentleman now living in the city of Mexico!"

"Alverda!" exclaimed Viola, in her astonishment letting fall the hand of St. Auburn, and clasping her own together. "Alverda, say you? Don Juan Gomez Alverda? did I hear aright? am I indeed his daughter?"

"You are, Viola," replied the sufferer, "as I hope for mercy hereafter."

"Oh! this is so strange! it bewilders me!" she rejoined.

"Do you know him, Viola?" inquired Harley.

"Oh, well, Morton—well—as well indeed, if not better, than I know you. A kinder, nobler-hearted gentleman does not live; and many and many a time have I heard him speak of the loss of his infant daughter, and wonder if she were living, while tears of grief rolled down his manly face. And to think that I, who have so often sat and sympathised with him, should prove to be that lost daughter! Oh, it is so singular—so strange—that I can hardly believe it true!"

"It is indeed very strange," said Harley.

"But it is as true as strange," pursued St. Auburn. "And

now, ere my voice fails me, listen, and you shall learn the secret of the mystery.

"Some eighteen months after my marriage with the lady concerning whom your father, Mr. Harley, and myself once had a quarrel, I spent the winter with my wife in New Orleans. I went there partly on business and partly on pleasure, expecting to remain but a few days, or a month at the farthest—but was detained there the whole season by the illness of my wife. During this period she gave birth to a daughter, who survived but a week. My wife being in a very weak, nervous condition, was so affected by the loss, that she became deranged, and continually called for her child, which she declared we had secreted for the purpose of taking its life. Nothing could be said to console her; and the physician privately stated to me, that unless another infant, about the same size and age, could be substituted, and she be brought to regard it as her own, he feared she would never recover her reason."

Here St. Auburn paused, apparently exhausted, although he had spoken in a very low tone. The surgeon gave him to drink of the mixture again; and after lying with his eyes shut, and breathing heavily for a few moments, he revived a little, made an effort, and resumed:

"My friends, I must be brief, for I feel that my minutes are numbered. May God spare me to relate my story, and give me time to repent of my many sins! For days I sought in vain for an infant suited to my purpose. At length one morning, on visiting one of the asylums, I learned that a child had just been brought there, whose parents, entire strangers in the city, were both lying at the point of death, from an attack of something resembling ship fever. I asked to see the child, and, on beholding it, was struck with its resemblance to my own. I subsequently learned that its father was a wealthy Spanish gen-

tleman, who had just arrived from the West Indies, where he had held an office under the Spanish Government, and that this child, and the one I had lost, were both born on the same day. To possess myself of this child, and rear it as my own, I was now determined, let the consequences be what they might. To effect this object, I thought over various plans, and at length adopted one, which was successfully carried out. I procured a stylish conveyance, and bribed two worthless fellows to dress in livery, drive to the asylum, represent themselves as Don Alverda's servants, and say that the parents of the child, being in a fair way of recovery, wished it to be taken away, and conveyed to a certain place, a few miles out of town, where special provision had been made for its reception. As I have said, my plan was successful. That night I received the child from the hands of my accomplices, to whom I readily paid a large sum, and advised them to leave the country, which they did. I took the little infant home, had my daughter's clothes put upon it, and presented it to my wife. For several days, however, no change for the better was perceptible, and I was beginning to despair of ever seeing her restored to reason, when, with a degree of joy which words cannot express, I saw her take notice of the child. A week from that time she had become perfectly rational, and was fondling the pretty infant, thinking it her own. Poor Mary! sweet, confiding, gentle Mary! She never knew otherwise; and died, believing that the child she had reared as her own, was of her own flesh and blood. That child, which we named Viola, is the lady that now stands by the dying bed of him who so vilely wronged her and her parents."

St. Auburn here uttered a deep groan, and again became silent. All present seemed amazed at the disclosure, and Viola was deeply affected. For some moments the heavy

breathings of the dying man alone broke the solemn stillness of the chamber. Then Harley ventured the question:

"But the parents of Viola—made they no inquiry for her?"

"Yes," replied the sufferer, speaking with great difficulty; "on recovering from their sickness, and learning in what manner she had been taken away, they became nearly distracted; and besides setting the police to work in every direction, her father offered an immense reward to any one who would give any information concerning her. The affair, too, got into the papers, and for a time created great excitement—no one being able to advance a satisfactory reason for her mysterious disappearance. If any one suspected me of a hand in the matter, they kept it to themselves. I have sometimes thought that our attending physician did; but he was a man who paid particular attention to his own business, and not a word ever passed his lips to me on the subject. I had but two confidants; and those were my cousin and his wife, at whose house we were staying. They never betrayed me—though it has ever been in their power to do so—for the clothes worn by Viola, when taken from the asylum, are still in their possession; and are, in fact, the proofs to be brought forward to substantiate this, my dying confession."

"This I believe to be true, Morton," said Viola, in a low, tremulous, excited tone; "for often have I heard Don Alverda tell how he once had a daughter just my own age, stolen from him in the manner related; while his good lady—my mother as I must now term her—sat by and listened, weeping bitter tears of grief for the lost one; but oh! little then did I think, or little did they dream, that I was that lost one—that they were pouring their griefs into a daughter's ear."

"It is very strange!" remarked the surgeon: "a tale

savoring more of the romance of the novelist than of reality."

"Reality often exceeds in romance the inventions of the brain," I replied; "and I, with but little experience, speak from experience."

"Yes, is it not very singular," resumed St. Auburn, "that the very man I had so deeply wronged, should afterward become one of my most intimate friends? We became acquainted in the city of Mexico; and for a long time the bare mention of his name made me tremble with guilt; and when he first related to me the story of his bereavement, I was so affected that he called for help, thinking I had suddenly been taken ill. Had it not been for my lamented wife, whom I dearly loved, and whose happiness was paramount with me to every other consideration, I should then have told him the story, and restored him a long lost daughter. But this feeling of guilt and remorse gradually wore away; and when at last I consigned to dust the earthly remains of my beloved Mary, and saw my fortune a wreck, and myself little better than an outcast, I suddenly became embittered against the world, and resolved to retrieve my fortune by the basest means—no less than the selling of this poor girl and her secret to a villain. But Heaven has punished me, and, I acknowledge, justly punished me, for my baseness. Had I acted uprightly, I should not be here now, whatever other fate had been mine. "Sir," he said, turning to the minister, "can a man be saved that dies without forgiving his enemies?"

"We are strictly commanded, in God's holy Word, to forgive our enemies," replied the divine, solemnly.

"Then," rejoined St. Auburn, "I will try to forgive him—I will pray for aid from on high to forgive him."

"Such is the fruit of a true repentance," responded the clergyman.

"Whom do you mean?" inquired Harley.

"Our mutual foe, the Count."

"Do you think it was his men that assailed us?"

"I do, Mr. Harley. But I will try and forgive him. There is none other against whom I hold any hard feelings. Ask your father, Morton, to forgive me, when I am gone; and oh! Viola, if you ever loved me, on your knees crave pardon of your kind parents for the wrong I have done them. Come nearer, Mr. Harley—give me your ear;" and the dying man made a private communication, which I subsequently learned related to the recovery of the articles worn by Viola on leaving the asylum. "These," he said, aloud, "may be of much importance to you."

"I will follow your instructions," replied my friend; "and had you been permitted to go with us, I would have kept my word with you."

"I know you would, for you are honorable, noble, and generous; but I do not need it now, and it was wrong in me to ask it. And now," he added, after a pause, "give me your hands."

Harley and Viola complied with his request, each placing a hand in one of his. He with an effort joined them.

"Suffer me to make one request more," he said.

"Name it," returned Harley.

"That you will permit this gentleman (glancing at the divine) to perform the sacred ceremony of marriage in my presence, that I may see you united ere I go."

"It accords with my own desire—shall it be so, dear Viola?" said Harley, in a low tone.

She drooped her head, and murmured something only caught by her lover's ear.

"Will you fulfill the request of Mr. St. Auburn?" said Harley to the divine.

The latter nodded assent; and after a brief but appropriate prayer, proceeded with the ceremony, which made them one by the most sacred of earthly ties.

It was solemn, very, very solemn, and deeply impressive, to witness a wedding by a bed of death—to see the living so strangely grouped around the dying — to behold that pair in the bloom of life, taking upon them those holy vows, in the presence of one whose spirit was about to wing its flight to the other world, as if to bear the intelligence into the awful realm of eternity. It was solemn—sadly, mournfully solemn—and left an impression upon the minds of all present that time could never erase.

When the last words of the ceremony had been said, a deep silence followed, broken only by the quick, heavy respirations of the sufferer. Then with an effort he extended a hand to the newly wedded pair, and said, in a voice husky with conflicting emotions:

"May you live long and be happy! I somehow feel that you have forgiven me, and I can die more contentedly. Go, now, my friends—go all—I would be alone with this man of God. Farewell!"

Morton and Viola each took his hand, gave it a farewell pressure, and retired in silence, deeply affected with the parting scene. I followed the example, and a minute later the room was cleared of all save the sufferer and the divine.

The surgeon now attended to dressing my wounds; and being greatly fatigued by my recent exertions and excitement, and weak from loss of blood, I retired for the night. I soon fell into a calm, refreshing sleep; and when I awoke, the cloudlesss sun of another day was streaming into my chamber. The dark night of strife, and blood, and storm,

was past, and all nature was smiling as sweetly as if such things had never been.

I arose with some difficulty, for I was far from feeling well and strong; but my wounds proving rather painful, I returned into bed. In a few minutes Harley entered my apartment, looking pale and serious.

"Well, what of St. Auburn?" was my first question.

"He is at rest," he replied, solemnly. "A little before day-light his spirit took leave of its mortal tenement, and is now with its Maker. He died calmly; and the reverend gentleman, who was with him in his last moments, was led to believe that he had made his peace with God."

"And Viola?" I inquired, after a pause.

"She is as well as can be expected after such a night of excitement, fatigue, and alarm. But you, Harry—how do you find yourself this morning?"

"Not so well as I had hoped."

"Ah! I am sorry to hear it. Do you feel ill?"

"I feel bruised and lame, and am in some pain. But give yourself no alarm, Morton—it is nothing very serious. If my wounds were dressed again, I think I should be able to be about."

"I will send the surgeon to you at once."

Harley went out, and in a few minutes the doctor made his appearance. An hour later I found myself able to get down stairs, though advised by the physician to keep myself quiet for a day or two at least. As I had anticipated, the events of the night had caused quite a commotion in the village, and the inn was thronged all day with visitors. Every thing, however, passed off without further disturbance; and the day following we consigned to earth the mortal remains of Henry St. Auburn—his body being accompanied to its last resting place by a large number of citizens.

Early on the third morning we set out for Galveston, travelling slow, by a four-wheeled conveyance. We reached our destination before nightfall, without the occurrence of any incident worthy of note.

It was the intention of my friend to proceed at once to New Orleans with his bride, and have me accompany them; but not having fully recovered my strength, I pleaded indisposition, and finally persuaded him to leave me behind. The truth was, reader, I had resolved to see Clara Moreland, once more at least, before leaving the country; but this was a secret which I did not even disclose to Harley, though I somehow fancied he more than suspected it.

Viola having repeatedly urged me to accompany them, finally took leave of me, with tearful eyes, but looking more sweet and beautiful than ever.

"Harry," said Harley, as he held my hand at parting, "we both owe you a heavy debt of gratitude, which, if we live, must be repaid, in one way or another. But, at all events, if you will not go with us, I must see you again shortly. As soon as the articles we are in quest of are in our possession, we will return to this place, and then you must accompany us to the city of Mexico, to the home of Viola."

"I will take the matter into consideration," I replied.

"Nay, it must be so—I will take no denial," he rejoined, earnestly. "There—God bless you! Adieu."

* * * * * * *

And here, kind reader, we must also part, at least for a season; for here terminates that portion of my narrative which I have thought proper to record under the title of "Viola." If I come before you again, it will be in new scenes, and with new actors—though all that I have introduced upon the stage, must again appear, ere the curtain falls upon the close of my drama of life. It has been my

fortune, in a brief period of time, to pass through many adventures—some pleasing, and some vexatious—some trying, and some thrilling—and some perilous in the extreme.—A portion of these—a small portion, it is true—are before you: those untold, I flatter myself, are not less interesting. Shall I go on? or will you rest satisfied with what you have seen? It is for you to decide, and for me to abide by your decision.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.—Having thus brought "Viola" to an end, we have just issued the sequel and conclusion to it, under the title of "*Clara Moreland*," which is of far more interest than the foregoing.

THE END.

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